



# Selling Innocence: The Sexual Exploitation of Unaccompanied Boys in Refugee Camp Settings and the Limitations of Sexual Gender-Based Violence Conversations

## Citation

Abousalem, Rasha. 2022. Selling Innocence: The Sexual Exploitation of Unaccompanied Boys in Refugee Camp Settings and the Limitations of Sexual Gender-Based Violence Conversations. Master's thesis, Harvard University Division of Continuing Education.

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Selling Innocence: The Sexual Exploitation of Unaccompanied Boys in Refugee Camp Settings  
and the Limitations of Sexual Gender-Based Violence Conversations

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

May 2022



## Abstract

The illicit and exceedingly lucrative act of sexually exploiting vulnerable populations of refugees continues to thrive, especially in the often-unchecked environments of refugee camps. Unaccompanied and separated children, regardless of their gender, face exceptionally high risks of sexual gender-based violence in camp settings, which often offer inadequate protection or care services uniquely designed for children. More specifically, research regarding the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied and separated boys (UASB) in such settings is remarkably minimal, with most research concerning sexual violence against males in the context of conflict or post-conflict settings or forced labor (such as commercial fishing or mining).

This research offers insight into discussions on the sexual exploitation of UASB under three scopes: First, a general review of the contemporary literature and data regarding the sexual exploitation of UASB; second, a discussion on the sexual exploitation of UASB in the context of refugee camp settings; and third, an analysis of the gaps in the existing literature and their correspondence with current sexual gender-based violence conversations concerning male victims. This research highlights opinions and information obtained from participants via a questionnaire generated for this study. The paper concludes with recommendations on how the sector may proceed regarding various approaches to optimize research, data, and programs aimed at sexually exploited UASB, in addition to the critical need to empower UASB in such settings to help them create their agency for a safe existence — one free from the fear of exploitation.

A muddied teddy bear abandoned in an unofficial refugee camp site  
located in Dunkirk, France.



Photo Credit: Rasha Abousalem, January 2016.

## Author's Biographical Sketch

Rasha Abousalem, a fluent Arabic speaker, has been working as an international humanitarian aid worker since 2014. Much of her work is in refugee camp settings, where she collaborates with various actors, including humanitarian organizations and government and military officials. Field experiences include multiple sites throughout France, Greece, Bosnia, Bangladesh, India, Jordan, Puerto Rico, and Colombia.

## Dedication

This research is dedicated wholeheartedly to the countless children worldwide who silently fall victim to the darkest of human behaviors. They are not faceless, nor are they nameless. They are the innocence that we recall in our old age, longing to grasp onto once more. May these children see the humanity in the world — one day.

To my parents Ismail and Haifa, who endured and sacrificed more than their children will ever truly know. The pains of their pasts are now overshadowed by the successes of their four children, nine grandchildren, and great-grandchild. They instilled in all of us love, faith, and justice. They held onto our Palestinian heritage since the exodus in 1948 (the Nakba) forced them to become refugees. Over the years, they have carried with them the beauty, legacy, and struggles of our beloved homeland.

To my husband Rick, who never stops believing in me. We met in a Jordanian refugee camp assisting Syrian refugees, and since then, we have shared our love for humanity. He has made many sacrifices to give me this incredible opportunity to fulfill a long overdue dream of furthering my education.

Lastly, to my dog Shakira. Although you cannot read this, I wanted to thank you for all the hikes and companionship you have given me as I stressed writing this paper. I am forever grateful for the day we found each other.

## Acknowledgments

The many months of research have been possible with the direction and support of the following who guided me through this process. I would like to give many thanks to:

My Thesis Director — Professor Jacqueline Bhabha: Thank you. I am privileged to have benefitted from your extensive knowledge and experience in research on migrant children and sexual exploitation. I am forever grateful for your expert guidance and kind support.

My Research Advisor — Dr. Doug Bond: Thank you for your support throughout my time at the university. I was honored to have you advise me during this challenging process — a privilege not lost to me.

Fellow student and friend — Luciana Vosniak: Thank you, Luciana, for the months of advice and friendship you gave me during my writing process. The many days and nights spent in the libraries together will be missed.

Thank you all for taking the time to encourage me during this challenging and insightful experience.



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## Acronyms

Child Sexual Exploitation	CSE
Gender-Based Violence	GBV
Inter-Agency Standing Committee	IASC
Inter-Agency Working Group	IAWG
People on the Move	POM
Sexual Gender-Based Violence	SGBV
Unaccompanied and Separated Boys	UASB
Unaccompanied and Separated Children	UASC
United Nations Children’s Fund	UNICEF
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR
Women’s Refugee Commission	WRC

## Chapter I.

### Preface

*This must be very under-represented. We certainly only know of the top of the iceberg.*

- KR #1

Calais, France — January 2016: This was no easy place for the vulnerable. I dressed in several layers: two pairs of tights, two long sleeve shirts, two pairs of socks, a pullover, coat, gloves, hat, and a scarf. It was frigid and windy since we were not far from the pier that led to the entrance of the English Channel. That was where they were all headed. Thousands of refugees sat stranded in what would be one of the most inhumane refugee campsites I had ever worked in. Conditions were so intolerable and dangerous that the camp had earned itself the nickname “the Jungle.” It was an unofficial refugee camp — an ill attempt by the French government to hinder the influx of refugees eagerly awaiting to cross into the United Kingdom. Roughly 8,000 men, women, and children<sup>1</sup> were scattered around, clinging to those from their country of origin to form some semblance of community. The destitute came from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa, desperate to start a new life of safety and opportunity. None had imagined the road to such a life would be full of endless inhumanity and despair.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers of the refugee population inside “the Jungle” were estimated, as there was no accurately acquired figure. The figure used was the averagely depicted number of refugees at the time (January 2016).

Mixed within the thousands of people attempting to cross the Channel illegally was an unknown number of unaccompanied and separated boys (UASB) — those who left their families behind to take a long journey into the unknown, traveling thousands of miles to reach France. The youngest UASB I met in the camp was a ten-year-old from Afghanistan. Through an interpreter, he explained to me that his journey to reach Calais took a little over one month. Still, he was not the youngest UASB inside the Jungle.<sup>2</sup> So many questions raced through my mind: What encounters did these boys have throughout their journeys? Who was taking care of them inside of the camp? Were they safe?

Due to the lack of security within the Jungle, organized crime groups operated with impunity. Drugs, alcohol, and exploitation, especially of a sexual nature, were rampant throughout the camp. Two UASB I spoke to informed me that a fourteen-year-old unaccompanied boy was known to be drugged and “used” by older men in the camp. During my unsuccessful effort to locate this unnamed boy, I was introduced to the leaders of three separate organized crime groups within the camp.<sup>3</sup> Through translated exchanges with them, I was able to obtain information about the pricing of sex with a UASB: £5

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<sup>2</sup> The youngest known UASB in the Jungle at the time was an eight-year-old who also fled Afghanistan. This was reported to me by the camp’s head physician and confirmed by the medical clinic.

<sup>3</sup> There were four internal crime groups that were in control of the Jungle. As I was informed by a source, these crime groups collaborated with local crime rings to sexually exploit UASB. Customers of this illicit activity included those located both inside and outside of the camp.



(pounds)<sup>4</sup> for oral sex and £8 (pounds)<sup>5</sup> for intercourse (with a boy as young as eight years of age).<sup>6</sup>

I was caught off-guard to just how deplorable the conditions were, including the utter absence of security to protect vulnerable populations and the amount of sexually exploited UASB. What I recognize in hindsight is that I was simply not looking at the situation properly. I very much had tunnel vision at that time — overlooking males, even young boys, as possible victims of sexual exploitation.

My time in the Jungle single-handedly influenced me to research the topic of sexually exploited UASB in camp settings and the conversations surrounding sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

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<sup>4</sup> Equivalent to a little over \$7 USD (reverted to January 2016 exchange rates verified by [Exchangerates.org.uk](http://Exchangerates.org.uk)).

<sup>5</sup> Equivalent to a little over \$11.50 USD (reverted to January 2016 exchange rates verified by [Exchangerates.org.uk](http://Exchangerates.org.uk)).

<sup>6</sup> These figures seem considerably low, but it should be noted that it is dependent on the customer purchasing the illicit activity. These costs are cheap for locals outside of the camp, but for refugees wanting to make such a purchase, it is relatively expensive due to the cost of living inside the camp and general lack of money due to their daily instabilities.

## Chapter II.

### Introduction

*Adolescents, especially younger adolescents (12-15) — both male and female seem to be at highest risk [of sexual exploitation]. They target this group because the young adolescents are more trusting of adults, they have less agency, and the shame associated with the acts often prevents them from reporting. [UASB] are highly vulnerable both because they have no adult guardian or parent protecting them and they often resort to selling sex to earn money...*

*Humanitarian organizations are also 'blind' to the scale of the exploitation and, hence, not equipped to respond...Boys, because of their gender, are viewed as able-bodied, better able to take care of themselves, less in need of protection and, hence, their vulnerability is often overlooked. [UASB are a] highly vulnerable group but for some reason, because they are boys, we don't feel they require the same safeguards and levels of protection as young girls. In other words, their gender impedes concern.*

- KR: Dale Buscher, VP of Programs, Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)

The world is currently amid the most significant refugee crisis since WWII. An unprecedented number of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are becoming displaced — dispersing throughout their homeland or making dangerous journeys across borders to desired host countries. Not unlike previous large-scale migratory movements, there come risks when traversing lands and crossing borders, especially for children who have been forced to part from the relative safety of their families to undertake the journey alone. In a 2009 report, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that increasing “scope, scale and complexity of population movements have multiplied the points of intersection between refugee protection and international migration” (as cited in Bhabha, p. 141). Regardless of status, this surge in global movement has escalated the number of children traveling unaccompanied at an alarming rate over the past several years (UNHCR, 2017, p. 11). With numerous conflicts and civil

unrest taking place worldwide, many children, driven by fear and hopelessness, undertake journeys that place them at increased risk of sexual exploitation and violence (UNHCR, 2017, p. 12). Traveling without the safety of parents or guardians who can provide protection and support, UASC face dangerous obstacles as they navigate the unknown.

Every year an unidentified number of UASC are preyed upon and forced to exchange sex for safe passage, sell sex to finance their journey or become sexually exploited inside the very camps they seek refuge in (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021, p. 32). Regardless of gender or age, sexual exploitation is presumed to be vastly under-reported for various reasons, including shame, fear, stigma, and organizational shortcomings. More specifically, the sexual exploitation of boys is considered under-recognized and under-served (UNHCR, 2003, p. 74) by a growing number of researchers and activists. Due to the many nuances that contribute to the complex nature of sexual exploitation, along with the inherent clandestine nature of people on the move (POM), reliable and accurate data is difficult to obtain, especially those concerning children (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2020, p. 6).<sup>7</sup> The vulnerable status of UASC, coupled with the insecurities of refugee camps, give exploiters the advantage to turn sexual exploitation into a lucrative industry, with an estimated profit of \$30 billion annually from trafficking for sexual exploitation (Inter-Agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2016, p. 5).

Exploitation comes in many forms, including forced labor, prostitution, child marriage, rape, and survival sex. Current research strongly suggests that sexual abuse and exploitation affect children disproportionately (UNHCR, 2017, p. 6) compared to their

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on statistics, please refer to Chapters V. and VI.

adult counterparts. Due to the unprotected nature of children traveling alone, UNHCR (2017) reported that there was “compelling evidence that a very large proportion of them are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence on their journeys” (p. 8). These risks do not subside upon a UASC’s arrival to a refugee camp, as they are faced with new and varying forms of exploitation due to the lack of protection programs and overwhelming humanitarian needs, allowing abusers to operate with minimal restraint (UNHCR, 2017, p. 16).

Although camps can be an essential component of a humanitarian crisis involving emergent refugee populations, they are generally considered places of insecurity (Jacobsen, 1999, p. 1) and possess high levels of risks for sexual exploitation, especially for UASC. Boys, as the overwhelming number of UASC in certain humanitarian crises, are at particular risk to sexual violence in such environments due to their isolation from the community and lack of adult protection (WRC & UNICEF, 2021, p. 7); widespread organizational deficiencies for male victims of SGBV expound these risks.

Organizational actors and providers generally prioritize services to those who are “traditionally vulnerable groups” (Arsenijević et al., 2018, p. 93), with extensive emphasis placed on women and girls. Although services offered to these vulnerable groups continue to be highly inadequate (either due to lack of funding or improper staff training), over the years, these groups have indeed gained recognition, helping to expose the severity of their struggles. While research established around gender and sex has gained traction (Schulz, 2019, p. 1), boys are continuously discerned as not being vulnerable to SGBV (WRC & UNICEF, p. 8), and the risks that males face (including UASB) remains a topic that is difficult to address. This lack of established research, data

and inclusive discussions can leave aid workers and organizations ill-informed on the risks and needs of UASB, resulting in a lack of substantive pragmatic approaches.

In research conducted by the UNHCR (2019), it was found that the “risk of sexual and gender-based violence against boys is a particular blind spot” within the humanitarian field (p. 19). Such blind spots can isolate boys from reporting SGBV to often female-oriented prevention and reporting services. SGBV against men and boys is not only less understood but at times less acknowledged, which in turn can result in increased vulnerability for male victims in such settings (UNHCR, 2012, p. 3).

Considerable impediments to well-founded qualitative and quantitative approaches incorporate outdated persistent ideologies within SGBV conversations regarding male victims. Assertions include those that suggest males constitute a “small but sizable percentage of victims,” as well as troublesome implications that reaffirm the detrimental notion that some victims are to be treated more sympathetically than others (Stemple, 2009, p. 606). Boys, an influential group experiencing child sexual exploitation (CSE), continue to be substantially excluded from research and policymaking (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, 2020, p. 1). Although recent research indicates that boys are reportedly just as at-risk of sexual exploitation as girls are within the UASC community (WRC, 2019, March, p. 14), such narratives can deter much-needed resources and services for male-specific responses.

The topics of sexual exploitation, SGBV, and their impacts on UASB require continuous, lengthy research and discussions involving a wide range of actors and multiple intersecting approaches. This research aims to present the various components that interconnect and influence the risks of sexual exploitation that UASB face in camp

settings while simultaneously analyzing the components of the restrictive ideologies within the wider SGBV sector that inhibit extensive conversations about male victims of sexual exploitation. As such, this is not an exhaustive study of the various nuances of the topic at hand but rather an attempt to briefly delineate the essence of various components that factor into both the sexual exploitation of UASB and conversations surrounding SGBV as the two are strongly interrelated. In addition to reviewing current literature, this research features insights from key respondents (KRs) interviewed explicitly for this study. The combination of primary and secondary resources highlights the various gaps in the scholarship on the sexual exploitation of UASB and key concerns regarding SGBV approaches.

## Chapter III.

### Research Approach

*Exploiters are simply a part of camp life and the most vulnerable are prone to sexual exploitation from a young age. [The risks are results of] the boys living together with adults...the so called 'safe places' are not functioning. [The representation of the issue is] not being monitored properly and is hidden. [SGBV conversations are] concentrated on women and girls, and not much on male/boys [since most organizations place emphasis on the risks of females]. There are no proper data, so most of the cases are presenting anecdotal information, and [these problematic data hurdles will continue if they are not dealt with] systematically.*

- KR: Apostolos Veizis, Executive Director, INTERSOS (Greece)

Due to limited statistics and information regarding the sexual exploitation of UASB, this study generalized its approach and research. Rather than concentrating on one specific region, various regions were used to help illustrate the possible severity of the matter. Additionally, restricting the research to one specific location might contribute to the inaccurate portrayal that the sexual exploitation of UASB is limited to distinct regions. Therefore, a two-level approach that includes quantitative and qualitative methods provides a more expansive approach due to the complex and limited nature of the topic.

### Questionnaire and Participants

This research included a questionnaire tailored explicitly for this study and was approved by the Harvard Institutional Review Board (IRB). The questionnaire was generated and distributed via the approved survey tool company Qualtrics. A secure link

through the Qualtrics system was sent to the emails of pre-approved participants. Questions consisted of general information, such as name, location, and title, to a series of open-ended questions regarding the topic matter. Due to the subject's sensitive nature, participants could have their responses used throughout this paper either entirely anonymously or only for specific responses. The questionnaire used for this research is provided in an Appendix B titled "Sample Questionnaire."

Responses to the open-ended questions could be either personal opinions or professional/official perspectives. Participants were not obligated to answer all the questions and, if desired, could withdraw their participation at any point. A consent form was required to be signed by all participants to begin the questionnaire. All responses were entered in the Qualtrics system between October 2021 and January 2022.

Those who received the questionnaire represent a wide range of actors that are considered to play essential roles in the research and general knowledge of the refugee population, complex emergencies and/or SGBV conversations. During this research, no adult or child from the refugee population, or any known vulnerable group, was approached to participate in the questionnaire.

Each participant for this research was designated as "Key Respondent" with the acronym of "KR." Respondents are either paraphrased or quoted by name or, those who wished to remain anonymous, are identified only by a designated number (e.g., "KR #5"). Said numbers do not signify any identifiable variables and hold no significant value.

### Limitations

Due to the sensitive nature of this research topic, several considerations and restrictions had to be taken to safely and adequately obtain information used in this



research. As a result of these considerations, the quantitative element of this paper was limited. Data sets referenced in this paper are restricted to secondary sources, including those not directly regarding the sexual exploitation of UASB in refugee camp settings, but are similar and can help provide supplemental information for this research.

A crucial limitation that has impacted my ability to acquire numerical data is that I did not speak to any UASC directly, regardless of gender or age. Therefore, I was unable to conduct any primary data collection. This was not only due to current COVID-19 travel restrictions but more importantly, to protect vulnerable individuals and not potentially expose them to further psychological trauma. Instead, any information or quotes from UASB regarding any sexual exploitation they have experienced was obtained from secondary sources and used indirectly, vis-à-vis previously approved research carried out by other researchers.

It is also understood that people, including children, identify or experience their sex, gender, and sexual identity in various ways. Although such factors impact one's risk to victimization, this paper only briefly discusses such determinants. The brevity of the discussions on identities does not allude to the relevance of such factors.

Another less apparent but possible limitation that should be recognized is the possibility of my personal field experiences impacting the result of this study. Due to my personal exposure to UASB in the field, there is always the potential that personal views on the matter could unintentionally impact the conclusion of this research. It was pertinent to discern between personal experiences versus unadulterated research. Still, the risk is always present and should be noted.

## Chapter IV.

### Initiatives, Policies and Protocols: A Brief Analysis

*[The representation of UASB in sexual exploitation narratives is] under-reported, under-researched, and as such, under-recognized in terms of the scope, the scale, and the harm that it does to young lives... Organizations that have historically focused on and prioritized SGBV services for women and girls are reluctant to change practice as well as to acknowledge that they are only meeting a portion of the need. We have conducted research with field partners and in our reports for them, they have removed all references to sexual violence against boys.*

- KR: Dale Buscher, Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)

Various actors have forged and implemented initiatives to hinder the widespread exploitation of children, including multiple international and national policies and protocols that many states have ratified or acknowledged to some degree. Below is a brief review of a diverse range of examples that highlight what initiatives have been implemented to help suppress the exploitation of children and/or offer general protection for this vulnerable group.

#### Africa

According to the UNHCR (2020), thousands of refugees and migrants suffer various human rights abuses before, during and after their irregular journeys across Africa. Among the estimated 6.7 million refugees (Statista, 2020) are countless UASC. According to recent reports, Sub-Saharan Africa plays host to roughly 26% of the world's

refugee population (UNHCR, Africa, n.d.). Initiatives undertaken by African organizations include:

1. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999): a region-wide human rights treaty adopted in 1990 that sets out to outline the rights of children and protect them from situations of exploitation, such as child marriage (Girls Not Brides, n.d.).
2. The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF, 2003): an independent institute for policy research and dialogue, influenced by the principles in the UN CRC, The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and other regional and international human rights programs. The ACPF monitors and reports progress, identifies policy options, and provides a platform for dialogue (ACPF, n.d.).

## Asia

Across Asia and the South Pacific are an estimated 9.2 million “people of concern” (UNHCR, Asia, n.d.). Concerning the South Asian region, UNICEF reported as far back as 2010 that there was no adequate legislation to fully address the sexual exploitation of boys (Frederick, p. 22, 2010). Additionally, not only does there continue to be a general lack of definitional clarity between the terms “trafficking” and “prostitution,” but states fail to make a proper distinction between adults and children (UNICEF, 2010, p. 23). In 2010 the Association of Southeast Asian States Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) included in its mandate assistance for its Member States to observe international and ASEAN mechanisms on matters related to the rights of women and children (ECPAT, 2017, p. 83). The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against

Children (RPA EVAC, 2016-2025) was also included in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children in ASEAN 2013 (ECPAT, 2017, p. 83). Although legislation remains fractured throughout the region, leaving much to be discussed and understood about the various forms of sexual exploitation (ECPAT, 2017, p. 83). some policies do exist. The following are some country-based steps that have been openly discussed or implemented to some degree:

1. Afghanistan: A National Plan of Action against Child Trafficking was originally adopted in 2004, but more recently (March 2021) the government of Afghanistan adopted a new National Plan of Action (NPA) by collaborating with the UNODC through its Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants initiative<sup>8</sup> (UNODC, 2021). A supplementary National Strategy for Children at Risk encompasses a wider range of child protection than the original NPA (UNICEF, 2010, p. 25).
2. India: In 1998 the Report and Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children was released and specifically addressed the needs of women and girls in the trafficking process. The National Plan of Action for Children which, according to UNICEF (2010), is a “more inclusive document” that applies to ‘all children’” and includes protection against various abuses, including trafficking, sexual and physical abuse (Frederick, 2010, p. 25).

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<sup>8</sup> For more information, please visit: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/glo-act/index.html>.

## Europe

In 2005 European states adopted the European Convention on Action against the Trafficking in Human Beings. This protocol is described by the Council of Europe (COE) as a “comprehensive scope of application, encompassing all forms of trafficking,” regardless of location, affiliation with organized crime, age, or gender of those trafficked (COE, n.d.). To address increasing refugee and migrant population flows, the EU has taken several protective measures aimed at vulnerable UASC populations. One such step was incorporating the following recast instruments into their Common European Asylum System (CEAS): Asylum Procedures Directive, the Reception Conditions Directive (recast) (RCD) and the Qualification Directive.<sup>9</sup> These policies promote regional cooperation and cohesiveness among Member States to implement distinct support and protection for unaccompanied children who have been trafficked (Mullally, 2019, p. 28). Additional steps taken by the COE regarding unaccompanied refugee and migrant children include the development of the following policies:

1. Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe (2017): contains proposed actions for states to help ensure that refugee and migrant children and their rights are protected in Europe (Mullally, 2019, p. 29).
2. Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005): contains special protective measures with the identification of unaccompanied children who are victims of trafficking (Mullally, 2019, p. 29).

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<sup>9</sup> Established in 1999 and reformed in 2020. For more information, please see European Commission’s CEAS information page: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system_en).

3. Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA, 2009): oversees and monitors the implementation of the COE Anti-Trafficking Convention (Mullally, 2019, p. 29).
4. The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation (2007): Otherwise known as the Lanzarote Convention, this reflects the CRC and its optional protocol. Articles 18-23 prohibit various sexual exploitative acts against children, including sexual activity with children and the recruitment or coercion of children into prostitution (UNICEF, 2020, p. 3).

#### United States

Concerning the situation at the US-Mexican border, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) refers UASC to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Although UASC are reportedly housed in the “least restrictive setting that is in the best interests of the child,” they have been placed in internationally criticized detention centers (Mullally, 2019, p. 38-39). Additional initiatives that address the sexual exploitation of children fall under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which include:

1. Cyber Crimes Center (C3): includes a Child Exploitation Unit. The C3 office aims to combat internet-based criminal activity (ICE, n.d.).
2. Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU): in addition to other functions, this unit conducts tactical operations worldwide to help identify and save child victims of exploitation, as well as identify and apprehend offenders (US ICE, n.d.).

## United Nations

1. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989): The CRC has been ratified by 196 countries<sup>10</sup> (Congressional Research Service, 2015) and aims to legally protect the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of every child.
2. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also known as the “Palermo Protocol,” 2000): An additional, but equally important, protocol was adopted by the UN General Assembly and ratified by 178 parties (UN Treaty Collection, n.d.). Regarding children, Article 3(c) of the Protocol distinctly states that "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if it does not involve any of the main stipulated in article 3(a).” This has important implications in that it recognizes that children can never act consensually in their own exploitation (ECPAT, 2019, p. 11). Regarding the overall Protocol, the UN stated it:

...establishes the first common international definition of "trafficking in persons". It is intended to prevent and combat such crime and facilitate international cooperation against it. The Protocol also highlights the problems associated with trafficking in persons that often leads to inhuman, degrading and dangerous exploitation of trafficked persons (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009).

A key observation about the Protocol is its significant inclusion of a discussion regarding “coercion” — expanding its elements beyond physical pressure to recognize that “brute force” is not essential for victimization in exploitation (Bhabha, p. 154). Even though coercion is not required in cases of exploitation involving children, it

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<sup>10</sup> Three countries are not signatories to the CRC: Somalia, Sudan, and the United States.

acknowledges that power differentials and abuse of vulnerabilities can act as components of coercion, supporting more current trends that include manipulation and psychological abuse (Bhabha, p. 154).

3. Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000): ratified by 120 states, this optional protocol to the CRC calls for the prohibition of child prostitution, child pornography and the sale of a child into slavery (Save the Children, n.d.).

### Male-Specific Approaches

A small, but noticeable international shift has been occurring in recognition of male victims of sexual exploitation (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8).

Although advocates and KRs insist that overall, there is significant oversight of male victims of SGBV and sexual exploitation in pragmatic approaches, some inclusionary international efforts include:

1. Guidance on Working with Men and Boy Survivors of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Forced Displacement (2012): Research and considerations conducted by the UNHCR.
2. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106 on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (2013): This resolution covered sexual violence during times of conflict to strengthen efforts to end impunity of perpetrators that commit such acts against both male and female victims (UN Women, n.d.).



3. Research from the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC): Various studies and analyses on sexual violence against males during times of conflict and displacement.
4. UNHCR's SGBV strategy initiative (2017-2019) focusing on advocacy, awareness-raising, and assistance with policy development, including 27 training events in 2018 that incorporated discussions on SGBV referral pathways, along with training and workshops (WRC, 2019, March, p. 51).
5. IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (2015) (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8).

#### Obstacles to Implementation

There are various international and regional policies and protocols designed to protect refugee children from various forms of exploitation. However, many obstacles remain in implementing these initiatives, including a lack of political resolve to enforce such standards (Mullally, 2019, p. 31). A considerable determinant of why some countries hesitate to enforce steps created to combat exploitation against refugee populations may be attributed to rising anti-immigration sentiment in many host countries. As a result of increasing and more often public xenophobia, many host countries have prioritized immigration control to curb incoming refugee flows, which has led to a denial of a (refugee) child's rights (Mullally, 2019, p. 31). Contrary to many formal state policies for protection, prevention, and victim identification, hindering illegal border crossings has been prioritized. The main objective of many governments and law enforcement officials is to deter irregular migration, which comes at the expense of vulnerable populations (Bhabha, p. 142).

An additional impediment of particular concern for UASC populations is the requirement to prove age to meet under-age requirements. Such a requirement can prove to be a distressing and challenging task for UASC originating from conflict zones or communities that do not retain birth records. This is of particular concern for teenage boys who might appear older than their actual age, preventing them from accessing programs for vulnerable children. In what has been argued as a particular concern in an alarming “growing trend” to counter immigration flows in Europe (European Association for the Defense of Human Rights, 2017), host countries have been contesting documents some UASC are providing by labeling them as “unauthentic” to hinder access to essential care.

#### Definitional Obscurities

According to a report by UNICEF (2020), definitional clarity regarding the term “sexual exploitation” presents a serious challenge (p. 3) and can “hamper efforts” to protect children from such experiences (p. 11). To combat definitional uncertainty, the Lanzarote Convention encourages states to refer to the CRC to maintain a unified and internationally recognized definition. Although such conventions can encourage uniformity, other states do not share this sentiment. Recent research that included a “systematic review of the global literature”<sup>11</sup> on the sexual exploitation of boys revealed that “the CRC conceptualization of sexual exploitation has not been consistently used” (UNICEF, 2020, p. 3).

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<sup>11</sup> Review was compiled on English literature.

A particular point of contention is the inability to distinguish sexual exploitation from other forms of abuse, in addition to how sexual exploitation itself relates to trafficking and prostitution (UNICEF, 2020, p. 3). According to ECPAT, sexual exploitation occurs when sexual activity involves exchanging monetary items, food, shelter, drugs, and other gains (as cited in UNICEF, 2020, p. 4). It is within this exchange that the uniqueness of exploitation takes shape. However, according to the IAWG (2016), a thin line distinguishes sexual exploitation from sexual abuse, although both circumstances can involve some exchange element to ensure cooperation and silence from the child (as cited in UNICEF, 2020, p. 4). For legal purposes, leaving such definitional ambiguities and uncertainties may not only delay prevention and justice for victims, but can unintentionally create loopholes that ultimately benefit perpetrators.

## Chapter V.

### Sexual Exploitation: A Quantitative Dilemma

*I think it is treated as urgent when it is known about; but the combination of shame/stigma and the lack of services targeting male survivors of sexual violence means that INGOs are often simply not aware of the need.*

- KR #2

For many years, questionable data sets have created inconsistencies and deficiencies in pragmatic approaches to address UASB victims of sexual exploitation. When it comes to humanitarian matters, statistics can have long-lasting and impactful results. Data often impacts the allocation of funds, resources, and staff, which various actors turn to help conceptualize and implement proper responses. Obtaining accurate data during complex emergencies faces numerous amplified challenges, especially concerning vulnerable populations (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2005, p. 25), but creating and maintaining reporting mechanisms and programs that support victims of sexual exploitation are many times difficult to implement. Due to a UASC's hesitation to seek help and support after incidents of sexual exploitation, there appear to be significant gaps in data (UNHCR, 2017, p. 12), as simply identifying UASC can be a daunting task. Currently, no suitable range of targeted mechanisms exists to identify and effectively engage with UASB populations, significantly hindering their prospects for accessing beneficial services (UNHCR, 2014, p. 55). According to Bhabha, sexual exploitation will continue “unabated” as long as victims remain unidentified; therefore, it is crucial to “radically improve” the system of victim identification (p. 167). Bhabha stressed that the

significantly small percentage of identified children who have been sexually exploited suggests “gross incompetence on the part of immigration, labor, and health and safety inspectors or significant complicity” between exploiters and government officials, including law enforcement (p. 167).

Due to such overwhelming inadequacies, the extent and impact on vulnerable children continue to be seriously under-researched and under-reported (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 3). Locations that have been significantly affected by refugee influxes and high numbers of UASC have highlighted the lack of male-specific data relating to the prevention of sexual exploitation (ECPAT, 2019, p. 8). As a result, male victims of SGBV continue to be under-represented in relevant laws and policies, causing the issue to go undetected and unaddressed (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 3), ultimately impacting programs and services, including those that offer safe pathways for disclosure. According to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children (2019), initiatives to tackle SGBV with a specific focus on the sexual exploitation of boys is “rarely advanced, despite the limited available evidence” that suggests boys are more broadly impacted than previously considered (as cited in Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 3).

A 2021 report by UNICEF suggested that aid workers should assume sexual exploitation and GBV are occurring regardless of data (p.164), even when evidence of such abuses against UASC are incomplete and anecdotal. Still, many aid workers suggest that the currently limited evidence would indicate very high rates of SGBV (UNHCR, 2017, p. 22). According to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children (2019), regardless of evidence that suggests boys

are more widely impacted by GBV than previously assumed, initiatives to tackle the matter continue to be rarely advanced (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 3).

### The Illusion of Statistics

Research on sexual exploitation is inadvertently plagued with systematic and rigid approaches that have created many rifts and uncertainty in data. According to a joint report published by the International Labour Office (ILO), Walk Free Foundation, and IOM (2017), there were an estimated one million child victims of sexual exploitation worldwide in 2016 (p. 9). Estimates in Kara's (2017, August) study indicate that a woman or child is sexually trafficked every 60 seconds worldwide (p. 16). It should be noted that interchangeable terminology in place of “sexual exploitation” has been used for situations that would be classified as such, resulting in data on sexual exploitation merging with similar categories, such as human trafficking and child maltreatment (UNICEF, 2020, p. 11).

The World Health Organization (WHO) argued that official statistics “vastly under-represent” male victims of rape (as cited in UNHCR, 2017, p. 13), leaving available data showcasing a minimal percentage of males being sexually exploited questionable. When asked about this under-representation, KR #2 responded that it is “impossible to speculate on, but given we know that one in five men are sexually assaulted by the age of 18, I would suggest that it is currently significantly under-represented.”

Acquiring a more objective portrayal of UASB victims of sexual exploitation has been marred by official corruption, lack of proper monitoring mechanisms, social/cultural stereotypes, and definitional obscurities (Bhabha, p. 146), in addition to the difficulty of

accessing UASB through standard sampling techniques due to their transient existence (UNICEF, 2020, p. 11). A lack of standardization has resulted in variances in statistical evidence on the sexual exploitation of boys throughout the years, with some ranging between 3% to 31% (HAGAR & World Vision, 2008, p. 60). More recently, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has reported that out of the known human trafficking cases, 27% of boys experienced sexual exploitation (Greenbaum, 2020, p. 483).

The UNHCR (2017) stated that research primarily from North America and Europe has shown that boys are at higher risk than girls of being sexually abused by a non-family member (p. 12), leaving UASB in camp settings highly susceptible. Furthermore, research suggests that when it comes to sexual exploitation, law enforcement and service providers are less likely to identify victimized boys than girls (UNICEF, 2020, p. 6), further complicating the dilemma of questionable data.

Limited data on sexual exploitation trends depict a frightening picture. Reports indicate that in 2019 European sex trafficking remained the most prominent form of exploitation at 56%, with a disturbing shift reported by European Union (EU) states: a sharp increase in child trafficking (Department of Justice and Equality, p. 12, 2020), which may correlate with the inflow of UASC into Europe since 2015. In Thailand (2017), available research uncovered that although thousands of Rohingya refugee boys had been trafficked for labor and sexual exploitation through “trafficking camps,” only 455 victims were formally identified (Mullally, 2019, p. 7).

## Roadblocks to Disclosure

Under-reporting is one of the most prominent issues plaguing all aspects of the sexual exploitation dilemma. Many factors and barriers contribute to the lack of disclosure from male victims, similar to barriers female victims face. In contrast, others are propelled by socio-cultural expectations and misbeliefs about masculinity (GBV AoR, 2021, p. 6). UASB encounter many similar fears as adult males when seeking much-needed help. Feelings of physical and emotional discomfort, partnered with humiliation, magnify the hesitation a victim can have against self-reporting. In his journal on child sex trafficking, Greenbaum discusses various reasons a child might not report sexual exploitation to authorities, including feeling helpless, shame, fear of exploiters or officials, or a possible bond with their exploiter as a survival tactic (p. 484).

According to Jensen (2019), other possible barriers to reporting include social stigmas, ineffective identification mechanisms, dismissive staff attitudes against male victims, underfunding, and lack of institutional responsibility (p. 7). An additional critical consideration that can impact the ability to generate reliable data is that children who experience sexual exploitation may suffer developmental delays due to the stress inflicted upon them and may have difficulty responding to questions regarding their experiences (UNICEF, 2020, p. 15). Earlier research suggests that in many cases (up to 99% in some research), boys and men undergo an “overwhelming fear” of disclosing sexual abuse (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 68).

Perpetrators of sexual exploitation assume that UASB, already marginalized in society due to their lack of status, are less likely to report exploitation or have their narratives believed. Additionally, UASB may not recognize their experience as a form of



sexual violence, as they might understand it only as penile rape or acts committed only against females (WRC, 2019, March, pp. 55). Regarding UASB, such obstacles can significantly hinder their ability or willingness to come forward with their sexual trauma (WRC, 2016, p. 4). As the UNHCR (2016) stated, the lack of statistics on the incidence of SGBV perpetrated against males suggests that “coming forward is problematic, or that data collected is not disaggregated by sex” (p. 21).

According to studies, most male survivors of childhood sexual abuse take more than 10 years to convey their experiences (UNHCR, 2014, p. 16). Such delay in disclosure might be attributed to deficiencies in post-care services, mistrust of providers, and a general lack of empathy for male victims, thus hindering males from coming forward with their encounters and impacting quantitative evaluations. Misgivings about provider confidentiality are among the most prominent factors in accessing services for refugees (UNHCR, 2017, p. 55). Current literature highlights that a lack of trust is a significant contributor to the reluctance to disclose experiences of sexual exploitation (WRC & UNICEF, p. 16). Refugees residing in informal settings such as camps display a sense of mistrust of the available services — skeptical of confidentiality, the disclosure process, and concern over exposure matters (WRC, 2019, March, p. 56).

Additional hindrances to disclosure may include legal recognition, lack of documentation, language barriers, and discrimination. Research by the SAREDA Project (2021) indicated that refugee victims of SGBV associated skepticism and fear with authorities due to previous negative experiences or misinformation about regulatory services (p. 4). UASB living undocumented in host countries may fear that reporting

experiences would reveal their legal status, thus leading to refoulment or interruption of their resettlement process (UNHCR, 2017, p. 56).

Further evident obstacles stem from the organizations and providers themselves. Due to the lack of protection and support, be it pre- or post-exploitation, UASB have minimal incentive to report incidents and seek out services, resulting in skewed and incomplete data sets. According to a WRC and UNICEF report (2021), the following also serve as impediments to UASB disclosing their experiences (p. 11):

1. Fear of “getting stuck” in a host or transit country due to reporting of a criminal activity.
2. A divide in communication and cultural variations between service providers and refugees, including a lack of interpreters and mediators, can hinder a victim’s access to services (Jensen, 2019).
3. Distrust that service staff will provide a safe, judgement free space.
4. A lack of knowledge of the available services from victims, including the benefits of seeking help from mental health care providers.

Research has illustrated that males are more comfortable expressing acts of psychological violence and physical torture rather than sexual violence (WRC, 2019, March, p. 55). However, they are more likely to disclose their experiences of SGBV in environments that make them feel safe enough to express themselves — one that is free of judgment and provides support and understanding (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 29). Those UASB who have fallen victim to sexual exploitation may not know how to express what has taken place (WRC & UNICEF, p. 22) or feel as if nobody will understand their predicament. Rather than explicitly disclose what occurred, boy victims at times use

euphemisms such as “you can’t imagine what they do” or innocently claim “he was kind to me” (WRC, 2021, p. 34). Generally, when disclosure does occur, boys may be more likely to reveal their experiences to a family member or relative (WRC, 2021, p. 34). Such disclosure preferences could contribute to a UASB’s hesitancy to disclose his exploitative experiences due to isolation from family.

### Confronting Cultural and Social Determinants

Societal and cultural beliefs, especially those regarding homosexuality and masculinity and stakeholders’ reluctance to acknowledge male victims, can drastically increase the risks of UASB being sexually exploited (UNICEF, 2020, p. 6). Due to the taboo nature of sexually victimized males, fear of victim-blaming, social alienation, and stigmatization can lead to a victim’s refusal to seek help (Jensen, 2019, p.5). UASB may fear that exposing their exploitation may make them the target of discrimination and mocking within the community they are residing in, inducing further isolation (HAGAR & World Vision, p.9). Fear of being seen as a perpetrator of sexual exploitation (rather than a victim), coupled with feelings of guilt for “involvement” in the exploitation, can lead UASB to become too fearful to report such incidents (WRC, 2021, p. 34).

Possibly one of the most prominent hesitations a UASB would hesitate to report sexual exploitation is linked to homophobic associations within the community, whether it be on the part of the home culture or host country, including the criminalization of same-sex sexual acts (GBV Area of Responsibility, 2021, p. 6). Regardless of sexual orientation, the possibility of being perceived as gay by others is too worrying to many UASB (WRC, 2021, p. 34). Negative and untrue notions about homosexuality leave many UASB too fearful of reporting the incident(s). For those who do not identify as

heterosexual, sexual acts carried out during exploitation can cause a victim to feel self-hatred or that they must have “deserved” it due to their orientation (WRC, 2019, March, p. 43). Such UASB may fear that reporting an incident may lead to the unsolicited exposure of their sexuality, as a result causing them to refrain from revealing their victimization (WRC & UNICEF, p. 12).

According to the WRC (2016), male GBV survivors are “highly invisible within the refugee community,” primarily due to cultural stigmas, misperceptions, and deeply ingrained stereotypes regarding masculinity (p. 7). Studies have indicated that social constructs of “masculinity” and its incompatibility with being a “victim” have created struggles with disclosure for male victims (UNHCR, 2017, p. 16). For UASB, attitudes that perpetuate the myths around gender roles can be a strong deterrent against reporting sexual exploitation (Jensen, 2019, p.5), regardless of the perpetrator’s gender. Weeks (1985) has explained this as a perilous “gender fragility,” meaning masculinity is “achieved by the constant process of warding off threats to it” (p. 190, as cited in Stemple, 2009, p. 633). Failure to do so can exacerbate the feeling of shame, which is often reported by male victims (Stemple, 2009, p. 634). As a result, males hesitate to come forward with sexual exploitation due to the fear of being labeled as “inadequate, weak or unmanly” (Jensen, 2019, p. 7).

Even though they are merely children, boys will feel the same pressure to prescribe to socially ascribed ideologies and stigmas of being “male” or a “man” — strong, self-sufficient, fearless, and in control. This ideology is referred to as the “male ethic of self-reliance” (Finkelhor, 1986, as cited in HAGAR & World Vision, p. 61), which helps perpetuate the idea that victimized males are “less manly” (HAGAR &

World Vision, p. 61). Overwhelming concepts of what it is to be a “real man” are frequently emphasized during periods of crises and displacement (UNHCR, 2016, p. 16). Males may have difficulty expressing their experiences due to concerns over “violating masculine norms,” which may result in their inability to conceptualize the sexual violence enacted against them because it is “socially constructed as a ‘woman’s issue’” (UNHCR, 2017, p. 17). These fears can lead a UASB to remain silent rather than be viewed by others as unmanly, resulting in further emotional and physical trauma (WRC, 2016, p. 7).

Not only are UASB faced with unreasonable gender expectations regarding their ability to protect themselves, but at times their unwanted sexual experiences are praised. Family for Every Child (2018) suggests that the sexual abuse of boys is “downplayed” or discerned as “normal male sexual experimentation” (as cited in UNICEF, 2020, p. 12). When sexual exploitation is perpetrated by a female, in many societies, it is often met with disbelief or indifference, in what researchers refer to as a “heteronormative framework” that perceives males as having control and desire over their sexual encounters (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 6). Instead, it is seen as a “learning experience” or applauded as a positive experience that the boy has endured (WRC & UNICEF, p. 10). Female perpetrators are depicted as lovers or maternal figures rather than abusers (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 6), a damaging notion hindering disclosure. Such praises for victimization by females can result in UASB not perceiving themselves as victims (UNICEF, 2020, p. 12), impacting incidence reports and data. According to The Violence Against Children Surveys conducted in various

countries, boys' "low self-perceived sexual victimization" was the main culprit for not accessing support services (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 6).

Furthermore, unlike adults restricting a girl's movement to protect her, boys are less regulated and allowed to engage in public spaces, potentially increasing their risk of exposure to predators (UNHCR, 2017, p. 30). This practice is common among refugee communities: girls are safeguarded from risks, whereas boys are commonly discerned as having the agency to protect themselves and are mistakenly considered "invulnerable" to sexual exploitation (WRC, 2018, p. 33). Regarding such limitations, KR Carina Hickling of the UN highlighted the following considerations:

The fact that boys can move around more freely also put them at great risk. Boys' gender roles portray them as being strong and competent - and the type of vulnerability that is implicit in their gender roles is not recognised. Vulnerability needs to be deconstructed and understood from the gender roles imposed on boys. Boy's sexuality, physical and psychological integrity is as worthy of protection as that of girls.

#### Survival Sex: Willing Participant or Victim?

Survival sex is the exchange of sexual acts for necessities, including clothing, food, and shelter (Refugees International, 2019). UASB endure heightened vulnerability due to the extensive pressure to support themselves, reach their destination and possibly send money back home to their families (WRC & UNICEF, p. 7). As stated in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 2000), any person under the age of 18 who sells sex is a victim of sexual exploitation (WRC & UNICEF, p. 10). Regardless of the attempt to universalize this concept, many service providers ascribe more agency to boys than to girls under such circumstances (UNICEF, 2020, p. 12) and still hold on to the notion that boys "voluntarily" or "willingly" sell sex

(WRC & UNICEF, p. 10). These beliefs within humanitarian and medical agencies can seriously impact data results. According to UNICEF (2020):

...some researchers have excluded data on boys who disclosed receiving money or gifts for sex under the assumption that they had misunderstood the question, while assuming that girls understood the question (p. 14).

In a regional study conducted by researchers, care workers not only assumed boys were engaging in prostitution voluntarily, but “dominant gender norms” perpetuated the notion that boys have “more agency and are un-coerced” in comparison to females (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 6).

An essential aspect of survival sex or sex work under such circumstances is that due to the nature of the act, including fear of criminalization, UASB may “self-censor” (UNICEF, 2020, p. 14) and not report an incident. Moreover, although aid workers might identify a boy as a victim (of sexual exploitation), the boy himself may refuse to be labeled as such (UNICEF, 2020, p. 16). Instead, a UASB may identify himself concurrently as a victim and perpetrator or recruiter (UNICEF, 2020, p. 17). Due to difficult living conditions, rather than see a sexual act as exploitative, a UASB may see it as advantageous; a way to earn quick money, food, shelter (UNICEF, 2020, p. 17) or to fund their migratory journeys (ECPAT, 2019, p. 2). Older UASB may sometimes recruit younger boys for exploitation in exchange for material items, including mobile phones and clothing (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 7). Greenbaum makes an important observation regarding this: that trafficked victims “perceive their situation as preferable to the one they left because they may have access to material goods.... a feeling of acceptance, or a sense of family that is otherwise not available” (p. 485).

## Chapter VI.

### Children on the Move: A Statistical Review

*Cases of the sexual exploitation of boys are heavily underreported in Serbia...the number of reported cases does not reflect the realist situation...The children were primarily boys, aged between 12 - 17, mostly nationals of Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, who travelled unaccompanied and experienced sexual exploitation throughout their journey from the country of origin as well as in Serbia.... The exploiters (the smugglers) use the boys' financial situation and the lack of legal options for travelling to lure them in with pocket money, promises of fast ways of reaching EU, to get them in debt. Later on, the exploiters force the boys to pay them back in sexual services and start sexually exploiting them.... through threats, blackmail, deliberate misinformation ('You will be deported if you contact the police. '), isolation, shame, and the lack of knowledge of languages...*

- KR: Irena Abdelmaksoud, Protection Office /UASC Specialist (Serbia), Info Park

Although an accurate international figure of UASC is hard to attain due to the clandestine nature of being a POM, reports by various organizations worldwide have supplemented UN and governmental figures to provide further insight into its extent. The Migration Data Portal revealed that between 2015-2016 there were an estimated 300,000 UASC recorded in a total of 80 countries (n.d.),<sup>12</sup> a rise of almost 500% from 2010. According to Mullally, conservative estimates for 2018 indicate that roughly 138,600 UASC either applied for asylum or received refugee status that year (2019, p. 6). By the

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<sup>12</sup> For more information, please visit: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/child-and-young-migrants>.



end of 2020, a staggering estimated 33 million children have been forcibly displaced worldwide (UNICEF, n.d.). Some figures of UASC from around the world include:

#### Africa

An analysis published by Statista (n.d.) concluded that out of the 1,634 children and young people<sup>13</sup> traveling without family throughout the Horn of Africa region:<sup>14</sup> 16% were traveling alone; 32% were traveling with a stranger; 8% were traveling with a smuggler. As of February 2019, of the recorded 60,000 child refugees/migrants living in Libya, 33% were UASC, with many asylum seekers remaining “invisible” due to the lack of acknowledgment by the Libyan government (Save the Children, 2020, p. 11).

#### Asia

The world’s largest refugee camp, located in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, is home to an estimated 950,000 Rohingya refugees.<sup>15</sup> This figure does not include the tens of thousands of refugees living in official and unofficial campsites littered across the Cox’s Bazar and Teknaf areas. The UN and the local refugee office estimate that children comprise roughly 55% of the Rohingya population. By 2018 there were an estimated 6,000 UASC from the Rohingya community living in the region (Save the Children,

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<sup>13</sup> The age group surveyed for this study included those between the ages of 14-24 years old. Due to the difficulty of obtaining updated statistics for refugees and UASC in Africa, the outcome of this study will be used to help support the purpose of this study.

<sup>14</sup> Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> These refugee numbers are debatable. By the summer of 2019 the UN Office for Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA) reported over 909,000 Rohingya, then in 2020 UNHCR reported slightly over 859,000 refugees instead. There is no indication as to a reason for this discrepancy.

2018). That same year, an additional 1,000 Rohingya UASC registered in Malaysia (Fishbein, 2020). The actual number of UASC cannot be determined in the Asia-Pacific region, as many of these children “live on the periphery of refugee camps,” and many do not claim asylum (Mullally, 2019, p. 6).

## Europe

At the start of the current refugee influx into Europe in 2015, an estimated 170,000 UASC applied for asylum in the EU (Hodal, 2017). By 2020 the number of registrants dropped to 13,600 (Eurostat, 2021),<sup>16</sup> with 37% of children reportedly unaccompanied and separated (UNICEF, UNHCR & IOM, n.d.). According to a report by Save the Children (2020), over 210,000 UASC arrived in Europe over the previous five years but stressed that the actual number is likely considerably higher, forcing many UASC into an “existence in the shadows of Europe, at risk of exploitation and abuse” (p. 6). Figure 6.1 provides two primary sites with significant numbers of UASB in Europe.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, please visit: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum\\_statistics&oldid=539013#Applications\\_by\\_unaccompanied\\_minors](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_statistics&oldid=539013#Applications_by_unaccompanied_minors).

### Figure 6.1: UASB Numbers in Greece and Italy

Greece: Out of the 5,379 UASC recorded, 92.9% were boys (ECPAT, 2019, p. 7) — the majority of whom still need long-term accommodation (UNICEF, 2020).

Italy: An estimated 10,700 UASC were hosted by the end of 2018, of which 92.7% were boys (WRC, 2019, March, p. 36). By the first half of 2019, 75% of new arrivals in Italy were designated as UASC, of which 93% were boys (UNHCR, UNICEF & IOM, 2020).

Overall, boys account for a reported 85% of the UASC who arrived through various Mediterranean routes between January and June 2020 (UNHCR, UNICEF & IOM, 2020).

### United States

As of March 2021, US border agents at the Mexican border apprehended 47,642 UASC (US Customs and Border Protection, 2021). Since then, plans to use a convention center located in Dallas, TX, to house up to 3,000 migrant teen boys have been discussed.

## Chapter VII.

### Existence on the Fringe: Refugee Camps

*The unaccompanied boys who decided to go to the official camps are often put together with single men which further exposes them to the risks of violence and exploitation. The general conditions in the camps are not good: there are places within the camp where there is no electricity, or even abandoned buildings or wooded areas where the camps security officer nor other staff is available.*

- KR: Irena Abdelmaksoud, Protection Officer and UASC Specialist, Info Park (Serbia)

Although refugee camps aim to serve as temporary shelters and protection for those seeking refuge, such settings tend to increase exposure to various forms of dangers, leaving many vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation (UNHCR, 2006, p. 27). During initial response phases to a refugee crisis, humanitarian assistance, including “biological needs,” are emphasized, many times at the expense of security concerns (Jacobsen, 1999, p. 1). According to UNHCR (2006), “real and perceived security threats” can influence the quality of a refugee camp that a state provides (p. 63), especially when they tend towards being in isolated areas that lack proper infrastructure and limited police presence (Vann, 2002, p. 14). Camps characterized by high population density, internal and external security concerns, and innumerable resource shortages provide ideal conditions for sex traffickers (UNHCR, Camps, n.d.). As a result of such issues, refugee camps perhaps offer the most favorable conditions for the use of deceit in recruiting prospective victims of exploitation (Kara, 2017, August, p. 7).

Due to such profound risks, humanitarian actors concentrate their efforts on vulnerable groups, often considered women and children (more specifically, girls). A UN Development Fund for Women briefing (2005) on trafficking highlighted that “refugees and internally displaced women and girls — especially in camp situations — are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of exploitation” (Riiskjaer & Gallagher, 2008, p. 115). The UNHCR (2006) stated that poorly structured refugee camps do not “take into account the needs of women and girls,” which can place them in danger of being seen as “sexual prey” (as cited in Riiskjaer & Gallagher, 2008, p. 66). The lack of humanitarian organizations and proper security inside camps “contribute to violence against women and girls,” while basic camp designs contribute to SGBV against females (Jensen, 2019).

Although the risks for all refugees living in camps being trafficked are discernible, no comprehensive empirical studies remain available for males. The minimal research on boys in similar environments strongly suggests that UASB are just as likely or even more likely to be at risk of sexual exploitation in certain circumstances. In such unchecked settings, sexual exploitation thrives with little resistance from UASB living in desperate situations (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 148). Organizational actors have primarily failed to emphasize that insecure camps can serve as a threshold to easily access UASB, making it effortless for exploiters to use resources inside, such as other refugees, to identify and recruit vulnerable UASB (Riiskjaer & Gallagher, 2008, p. 9). Such neglect of camps and their risks only encourages a dangerous perpetual cycle of hidden sexual exploitation that exploiters will continuously utilize.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on exploiters, please see Chapter VIII.

## Security Risks and Structural Concerns

Frequently, there is minimal control or restriction on who can access a refugee camp location. Fences serve as a minor deterrent — often, people will cut through fencing to bypass entrance security, making it easy to smuggle people, goods, weapons, and drugs in or out of a camp. Endemic problems, such as overpopulation in deplorable conditions and inefficient security measures, can render protective measures meaningless (Mullally & Raissian, 2019, p. 34). Figure 7.1 provides an example of the dangers of over-population in camp settings can be for vulnerable populations.

As UNHCR stated in a 2006 report, “some argue that more effort should go towards ensuring good camp management and providing general physical protection to refugees” (UNHCR, 2006, p. 82). A KR for this study provided insight into some of the difficulties that hinder properly implemented security in camps:

Overall security at the camps has to be strengthened, which is difficult in countries that host camps where security systems and resources tend to be underdeveloped or funded, and there may also be a higher level of corruption and weaker institutions overall.... - *KR #10*

An inefficiently designed camp that lacks appropriate structures places UASB at high risk of being exploited. Structural flaws, typically utilized by perpetrators, can significantly increase risk factors, putting boys in exponential danger of being exposed to sexual exploitation. Children often cohabit with unrelated adults in informal shelters (Save the Children, 2020, p. 10) that offer limited privacy options. According to UNHCR research (2017), perpetrators lure unsuspecting boys with promises of food or money into vacant buildings, bathrooms, or caravans (p. 31). This lack of adequate and safe shelter options leads many UASC to relocate to informal camps with minimal oversight, leaving

them highly vulnerable to being sexually exploited (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2018, p. 17).

Figure 7.1: Moria Camp – Unprotected Population

An example of how easily numbers of inhabitants in a camp can escalate and how challenging it can be to control the population is the now non-existent Moria camp in Lesvos, Greece. Before being destroyed by a massive fire in 2020, Moria reached well beyond its population limit. The camp was initially meant to house no more than 3,000 refugees at the onset of the crisis in 2015. Within five years, Moria became home to 7,000 refugees, with an additional 13,000 individuals surrounding its external perimeter (Schülke, 2020). Although the number varied, it was estimated there were 1,100 UASC on Lesvos in 2019. A fenced area inside Moria, referred to as “Section B,” was meant to provide protective housing for 160 UASC but instead housed 520 UASB (Saleem, 2019). The remainder of the UASB were forced to live throughout the camp — unprotected, vulnerable, and fending for themselves.

## Chapter VIII.

### Tools of Deception: Exploiter Tactics

*Till now I have not seen any project which work aiming sexually exploited boys...Though there are plenty of projects working in GBV related issues, but I witnessed almost all of the tasks are for girl survivors.... In comparing to females, boys are hardly given importance...Organizations are more comfortable discussing GBV focusing on female. Despite working since last 3 years I never heard any discussion focusing on male in GBV...Such as after being sexually exploited there are several options for girls to go through — medical checkup and legal support...on the other hand I have not seen the equal opportunity for boys...As a result, refugee boys often confuse where and who to inform their problem...To protect unaccompanied refugee boys, firstly perspective towards vulnerability of male and female needs to be changed...The generalized perception that boys have no or less protection concern must be changed.... Here in our context most humanitarian professional think GBV always happen to women and so their activity according to the perception. This must be addressed and include activity targeting boys too.*

- KR: Md. Imam Hassan, Field Worker, Rohingya Refugees (Bangladesh)

Sexual exploitation can involve various degrees of nuances and complexities. At times it can comprise a complex international criminal ring, or it can simply be one person exploiting another on a one-to-one basis. In Italy, international criminal groups from Nigeria, Moldova, Romania, and Albania coordinate with local mafias to control most trafficking victims transported to and from the country (Kara, 2017, August, p. 22). In contrast, small sex trafficking groups and individual exploiters primarily operate throughout Asia (Kara, 2017, August, p. 22). Regardless of criminal sophistication, a strong deceptive connection forms through deceit, coercion, fear, and power differentials, pressuring UASB to give into exploitative demands (WRC, 2021, p. 34).



One of the most frustrating and problematic matters facing humanitarians is the lack of legal repercussions perpetrators face. According to the UNHCR (2016), impunity for these crimes is “intrinsically linked to social tolerance” and cultural beliefs and practices that foster such behaviors (p. 670). Kara (2017, October) argues the following:

The immensity and pervasiveness of slavery in the modern era is driven by the ability of exploiters to generate substantial profits at almost no real risk through the callous exploitation of a global subclass of humanity whose degradation is tacitly accepted by every participant in the economic system that consumes their suffering (p. 26).

### Tricks of the Trade

Key Respondents for this research identified various tactics exploiters employ, including coercion or deception; physical force or threats against family; threats related to shaming; the offering or exchanging of benefits (incl. food, money, gifts, or other forms of aid); fake promises of a job; protection from authorities; provision of shelter or protection; and other forms of general support and resources in exchange for sexual favors. Exploiters will use an assortment of persuasive and intimidating techniques to formulate bonds with unsuspecting boys to distort their perception of events (UNHCR, 2003, p. 70). Sophisticated grooming methods help manipulate reality, making for more compliant victims, eventually leaving many exploited UASB unable to recognize their victimization (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 42).

According to research, oftentimes, children who are sexually exploited are labeled with terms such as “selling sex,” “sex workers” or “prostitutes” (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 42). Since prostitution is illegal in most countries, an exploiter may effectively put such terms to good use and convince the UASB that he will get in trouble with the police and face prison or deportation, therefore ensuring compliance and silence from the

victim (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 42). As KR Gurvinder Singh, a Senior Advisor in the IFRC, reported: "... smugglers can demand unpaid fees and require children into sex work to 'cover those fees'...children can be recruited through many means but essentially exploit their dependence and desperation." Under such pretexts, a UASB may believe that he is giving consent, further prompting him to engage in sexual acts (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 2). It is important to remember that no act can be considered consensual due to the advantaged position the perpetrator has over the UASB, and that often a UASB is fearful or under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8).

### Manipulation

Exploiters will also use the enticement of companionship to lure lonely boys, even resorting to the use of other boys to recruit vulnerable UASB deceitfully. Using friendships (real or perceived), these young recruiters will frequently persuade their friends to join them with promises of food or money (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 90). To escape the perpetual cycle of sexual exploitation, the young recruiter may be (falsely) promised a reduction of his debts or an end to his sexual exploitation if he assists in obtaining new (often younger) recruits to be exploited (Hodal).

Due to the lone and challenging state of existence a UASB may lead, he may even seek "love" and protection from the exploiter (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 165). This feeling of despair and loneliness a UASB may feel is easily recognized and taken advantage of by an exploiter. An exploiter will at times attempt to gain the UASB's trust to create emotional dependency, making it easier to manipulate the highly vulnerable child (UNHCR, 2016, p. 880). Such grooming techniques and behaviors can lead boys to

welcome the attention and believe that they have freely chosen this lifestyle (thus, not comprehending their exploitation or victimization) (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 165). UNICEF (2020) reported that it is “common” for children who experience sexual exploitation to develop an emotional attachment to their exploiter (p. 14). As a result, this attachment can lead to hesitation by the UASB to speak ill of his perpetrator (UNICEF, 2020, p. 14), wishing to protect him instead. This overdeveloped sense of attachment is not necessarily false, as the UASB might genuinely feel a connection with his exploiter or perpetrator.

An exploiter in a position of authority or power, such as a community leader or teacher, can effortlessly emotionally manipulate UASB using false trust and intimidation extending from current power differentials. Two KRs gave examples of incidents that occurred under such pretenses:

One example in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, the sexual exploitation of boys by older men and men in positions of power in the camps is not uncommon. The refugees all know it happens, but no one talks about it as any discussion of sex is taboo. Additionally, many don't necessarily see it as a child abuse issue but rather a cultural issue. So no one reports.

Dale Buscher, VP of Programs, WRC

The child (7) was an unaccompanied boy and living in a caregiver house. He used to go to religious center for his learning. Within few days the caregiver noticed some bruises in his body. They asked the boy what happened then he said his teacher was abusing him since few days. The caregiver directly asked for justice to community leader but this time the abuser escaped...In case of male oriented SGBV community people consider it as an accident and hardly realize the necessity of the support to SGBV survivors.

Imam Hassan, Field Worker, Rohingya Refugees (Bangladesh)

## Technological Predation and Entrapment

As a result of globalization and technological advances, it has become increasingly uncomplicated for predators to exploit the most vulnerable in a desired population, especially in precarious camp settings where there is little oversight. Cell phones have exponentially simplified the luring and entrapment of UASB into sexually exploitative scenarios. Male exploiters, especially those who live inside the same refugee camps as the UASB, will use cell phones to take pictures and videos of unsuspecting UASB as they undress or use the bathroom (WRC, 2017, p. 34). Afterward, exploiters use the images to extort and silence UASB, pressuring them into sexual submission. During sexual encounters, more images and videos are taken of UASB in compromising positions for future extortion and submission (UNHCR, 2017, p. 35). UASB that identify other than heterosexual can face further dilemmas. Figure 8.1 provides an example of how technology can be used against vulnerable populations.

Figure 8.1: Libya –Exploitation by Extortion

According to an Italian legal aid officer, traffickers in Libya purposely target homosexual males and steal their cell phones to extort them: “One gay couple...was separated from the rest and put into a specific camp because they were gay and were going to be sexually exploited” (WRC, 2019, March, p. 9).

The internet has proven to be a beneficial tool to online sexual predators who have found numerous ways to take advantage of unsuspecting and desperate UASB.

According to UNICEF’s “State of the World’s Children 2017: Children in a Digital World,” 1/3 of internet users are children, over 175,000 children go online for the first time every day, and roughly 75,000 individuals are online at any given time looking to connect with a child for “sexual purposes” (UNODC, 2020). Perpetrators will recruit, proposition, or solicit a child via specific websites or apps (WRC, 2019, October, p. 35) that are easily accessible by potential victims, helping form a quick and trusting relationship between the child and those who wish to exploit him. Social media sites are particularly alluring to children but can possess a high sense of deceit and danger. As KR #1 reported: “...exploiters ‘sell dreams’ to the children...It might also take the form of messages from a ‘fake’ lover, someone supposedly interested in them who wants to get to know them and spend the rest of their life together.” The WRC (2019, March) referenced how “groomers” lure children using deceptive means via Facebook by the following method referenced by a Child Protection Officer (CPO):

Someone will send a friend request [on Facebook] and then they start a conversation. They ask the boy to come over to his house to talk or will pay him to clean the house. Usually, it’s vague. Then they groom at the house—they start discussing sex and they show the boy porn. It’s not physically forced sex. They [boys] rationally decide, ‘this will help me solve my problems.’ All they can think about are their vulnerabilities—that they have no money, they are worried about families, they are scared about their future—so when the groomer shows up they think it will solve their problems (p. 38).

As referenced above, in addition to social media platforms, pornographic materials (e.g., pictures and videos) are often used to intrigue a UASB and formulate a connection to help secure future sexual exposure (WRC, 2021, p. 35). According to the UNHCR (2017), perpetrators will “bait” potential victims by first exposing the boys to porn on their phones, then persuade them to go to secluded areas with the promise of showing them more porn (p. 31). A GBV officer in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh

referenced how some *Majhis*, who serve as community leaders, used the tactic of exposure to porn (using the “authoritative figure” approach discussed earlier) to lead Rohingya boys into sexual exploitation (WRC, 2018, p. 33).

### Survival Strategy

Exploiters are fully aware of the challenges a UASB is confronted with around refugee camps, fully exploiting the fear and uncertainty a vulnerable boy is experiencing. They will convince UASB that it is in their best interest to cooperate with their sexual demands in exchange for tangible goods or intangible benefits, in such that doing so will ensure their safety inside the camps (Wilson, 2011, p. 7; Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 2). On the contrary, exploiters may also resort to apprehending a UASB’s mobile phone or documentation or deny him resources or access to services to force the UASB into submission (UNHCR, 2016, p. 880).

Ultimately, UASC of any gender and age are highly vulnerable to falling victim to the deception of exploiters, as KR #1 expressed in the questionnaire:

I think that unaccompanied and separated children are most at risk. In the eyes of exploiters, I guess that any age or gender has value given the wide scope of exploitation they place children in, and limitless cruelty they show. However, instinctively I would tend to find teenagers most at risk, maybe because they are also at an age where they want to take control of the situation and act for themselves or their families and would be easy prey.

## Chapter IX.

### The Aftermath: Ramifications of Sexual Exploitation on UASB

*The consequences for boys must be better understood — and the long-term psychological harm must be re-evaluated and valued. The consequences of SEA for the individual boy/man is not understood — it is not just about treating boys so that they do not go on and become perpetrators themselves...*

- KR: Carina Hickling,  
Child Protection Area of Responsibility (AoR)  
Coordinator, Child and Adolescent Survivor Initiative (CASI),  
United Nations (UN)

A discussion on the consequences of sexual exploitation on UASB can be problematic, as risk factors of exploitation tend to overlap with the consequences, leading to cross-sectional data analysis (UNICEF, 2020, p. 8). Moreover, although substantial research is available on the consequences of sexual abuse, less research has been carried out on the consequences of sexual exploitation (UNICEF, 2020, p. 8); due to a strong correlation between both acts, conversations tend to overlap and merge.

To properly serve UASB's needs, providers of all capacities need first to understand the impacts sexual exploitation has on victims (WRC & UNICEF, p. 9). Researchers stress that no standard reaction applies to all victims of sexual exploitation, but rather the impacts of such experiences will vary from one person to the next (WRC & UNICEF, p. 9). Victims of sexual exploitation encounter recurring psychological trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and physical ailments without the assistance of structured psychosocial support or medical clinics (WRC, 2016, p. 7). In various program

settings, though, staff have expressed their frustrations, inadequacies, and lack of rapport with the boys they encounter (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 10).

It is not uncommon that UASB are frequently regarded as merely misbehaving or experiencing behavioral issues rather than as victims with needs (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 10). Sexually victimized UASB usually feel frightened and are under intense pressure to survive (WRC & UNICEF, p. 16), while research in various contexts has indicated that sexual violence against males leads to both short and long-term physical, mental and social effects (UNHCR, 2017, p. 16). A scarcity of medical and SGBV services, in addition to identification impediments, has had substantial implications on the physical and mental health of UASB, with countless boys turning to self-harm, drug addiction or suicide in a desperate attempt to manage their circumstances (Mullally, 2019, p. 34).

### Physical Repercussions

UASB may suffer various forms of physical consequences due to their experiences. Some physical ailments that can occur to UASB include abdominal pain, rectal fissures, hemorrhoids, incontinence, anal leakage, impairment or scarring of genitals, STDs, and future sexual dysfunction (WRC, 2019, March, p. 2; UNHCR, 2017, p. 14). Some physical effects, such as bedwetting, can also be attributed to psychological trauma. Such symptoms can cause victims to feel shame and lead to mockery by others in their community, leading many UASB to conceal not only their sexual encounters but the physical impact as well.

During sexual exploitative acts, UASB are forced or coerced to engage in acts, such as those involving anal or oral sex, that could lead to potential physical



repercussions that, if left untreated, could result in long-term consequences (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 9). Since many perpetrators do not use a form of prophylactic, such as a condom, one of the most severe and permanent physical consequences that could result from being sexually exploited is becoming infected with HIV/AIDS (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 91). Although the medical field has made incredible advancements in their treatment of HIV/AIDS, leading many infected people to live reasonably healthy lives for decades, UASB are not in positions that would afford them proper medical treatments. In addition, and just as serious, a UASB might not know he is infected and unknowingly spread the disease to others through further sexual acts.

However, the physical consequences can go beyond bodily harm. The sexual penetration a male victim has experienced is often associated with homosexuality and femininity, disrupting a victim's understanding of his own "manhood" (Stemple, 2009, p. 634). Occasionally, even during an unwanted sexual experience, a male victim might experience penile arousal. Although this is an uncontrollable physical reaction that most would associate as a positive response, it does not mean that the UASB enjoyed the sexual act (WRC, 2021, p. 10). If the perpetrator was male, such a physical reaction could often leave a heterosexual UASB questioning his sexuality, feeling emasculated, and fearing that the experience "turned him gay" (WRC, 2021, p. 10). Just as worrisome, misunderstood feelings of sexual arousal during an exploitative act can lead UASB to mistake the experience as positive (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 12).

### Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is not uncommon in situations and environments with high stress-inducing levels. The isolated journey a UASB undertakes (usually for prolonged

periods), combined with the uncertainties of their futures, can lead to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and powerlessness (Arsenijević et al., p. 93). Overwhelming, complicated feelings can trigger a deep desire to turn to drug and alcohol (ab)use as a coping mechanism in a desperate attempt to suppress disturbing memories and emotions (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 74). UASB are often highly susceptible to such harmful behaviors to help them cope with precarious surroundings (Kara, 2017, August, p. 9), with research consistently finding high levels of substance abuse amongst boys who have been sexually exploited (UNICEF, 2020, p. 9).

### Psychological and Behavioral Consequences

Victims of sexual exploitation, regardless of gender and age, face immeasurable adverse impacts on their mental health. A meta-analysis of 37 studies (1976 -1996) that analyzed the impact of childhood sexual abuse determined that there were “substantial increases” of risks and consequences with no discernable difference between genders (Stemple, 2009, p. 616). However, research by Simic (2015) stresses that some triggers are gender-specific traumas and are unique to males, including feelings of emasculation (p. 4). UASB, although still children, can experience similar emotions as men and may feel as if they have become feminized or “less of a man” from acts of SGBV.

A range of distressing psychological reactions from victims can manifest in the following forms: nightmares, anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, sleep disorders, dissociation, auditory hallucinations, paranoia, memory loss, aggressive behaviors, and emotional outbursts (UNHCR, 2017, p. 36). Behavioral issues, including aggression, non-compliance, and delinquency, have been commonly reported by providers as well (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 75). Some providers incorrectly assume

that victims of sexual exploitation will become withdrawn and quiet, when in fact, some may experience opposite reactions, such as aggression and noisiness, to mask their pain or ward off future perpetrators (WRC & UNICEF, p. 9). Additional signs of exploitation reported by KR Md. Imam Hassan, a field worker in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, included exploited boys being frightened of specific individuals or victims locking themselves in rooms. Figure 9.1 highlights how the stress of sexual exploitation can lead to psychological distress manifested as self-cutting.

Figure 9.1: Pakistan - Coping by Self-Harm

A study in Pakistan highlighted significant concerns as to the psychological impacts on sexually exploited street boys, including those who were in prostitution and exchanged sexual services for money, drugs, or goods: 52% of boys who were engaged in such acts reported self-cutting behavior (UNICEF, 2020, p. 8). As a result of the overwhelming psychological impact of sexual exploitation, there is an increased risk of UASB turning to destructive physical coping mechanisms, including self-harming. UASB in camp settings and street boys in various locations face similar risks to exploitation; therefore, using such studies can give insightful supplementary information to help further understand the trauma sexually victimized endure.

Males exposed to exploitation and SGBV are likely to feel “insufficient justification guilt” if they did not attempt to fight back against the perpetrator (O'Brien, Keith and Shoemaker, 2015, as cited in Jensen, 2019). To make up for the lack of situational control, UASB may become aggressive in social settings by using physical

violence or other risky behaviors to reassert their masculinity (Javaid, 2016, as cited in Jensen, 2019). Victims may demonstrate a need to remain independent and care for themselves by not disclosing incidents (Javaid, 2016, as cited in Jensen, 2019).

Sexual exploitation is also associated with what is referred to as “complex trauma” — the “chronic exposure to traumatic events, often interpersonal in nature” and beginning in early childhood (UNICEF, 2020, p. 8). Such trauma can “disrupt” emotional management and result in a range of behavioral ramifications, including language impairment and delays and attachment difficulties (UNICEF, 2020, p. 9). Forms of sexual abuse in boyhood have also been linked to “high-risk sexual behavior,” including “sexual revictimization” and compulsive sexual behaviors (WRC, 2019, October, p. 47; UNHCR, 2017, p. 36). A CPO in Italy expressed the serious psychological repercussions sexual exploitation can have a UASB:

The impact is both psychological and existential. It starts an endless loop of confusion, shame, isolation, frustration, and exhaustion. A failure loop. Especially for the Muslim boys, it's very hard on them because of their religion. They are not accepted, they are cast out. They feel like misfits, outcasts, when they are engaging in sex work. They can't reach out to their community. The feelings are overwhelming — they have no peace and it's very disrupting, so they stop communicating with family at home, so it's even more isolating... They end up collapsing inside because they can't cope (WRC, 2019, March, p. 44).

As discussed earlier in this paper, sexual exploitation perpetrated by another male can have remarkable impacts on a UASB's identity, causing a disruption of his understanding and leading to confusion about his sexuality and perceived “manhood” (WRC, 2019, October, p. 43). For UASB who identify other than heterosexual, such sexual victimization can trigger feelings of self-blame or self-hatred — that they somehow become “tainted” or “deserved” the act (WRC, 2019, March, p. 43; 2021, p. 2).

## Chapter X.

### Confronting Gender: Conversations on SGBV

*There are no services that explicitly address boys...There is limited understanding of the needs on behalf of the service providers...Traditional service providers (Health, GBV, Child Protection) don't have the capacity/capability to address boys...There is a global conceptual gap in the understanding of needs and what is an effective response...there is a lack of understanding of boys' vulnerability.*

- KR: Carina Hickling  
Child Protection Area of Responsibility (AoR)  
Coordinator, Child and Adolescent Survivor Initiative (CASI)  
United Nations (UN)

Since the 1990s, feminists and supporters have made significant efforts to bring to light the sexual violence that women and girls face during times of conflict and displacement, including the development of GBV guidelines for the IASC (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 30). SGBV, as an abuse of unequal power relationships, is particularly prone to manifest during times of crises, such as conflict and displacement settings, and is significantly under-reported (UNHCR, 2016, p. 16). According to the IAWG UASC (2017), GBV occurs in three forms: 1) randomly (e.g., when the displaced are in transit or re-settle in insecure locations); 2) opportunistically (e.g., transactional sex); or 3) systematically (to cause humiliation or shame) (p. 26).

Although expanding research has included gender-neutral language in recent years, in addition to recognizing the need for gender-specific initiatives, the issue of male SGBV in policy papers and approaches is still not being thoroughly examined (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8). In multiple contexts, boys have been

“consistently left out of gender-based violence prevention and response efforts” (Alrabe et al., 2017). Little research about the sexual exploitation of males usually comes in the form of conflict, post-conflict, or en-route sexual exploitation and GBV experiences, often comprising the experiences of adult males, leaving little to be known about UASB.

This chapter briefly analyzes some of the pertinent and persistent issues within SGBV dialogue and approaches.

#### “Gender”: A Feminine Approach

The use of gender-neutral language in various factors has been of increased concern to some actors and researchers, as it can still indirectly imply “female”. As Bhabha discussed, when documenting such complex situations, there is an overall challenge in the tendency to discuss “women-and-children” together as if they were one entity (p. 146). More specifically to boys, a published report highlighted that although the word “children” is repeatedly used in various trafficking legislations, the focus tends to be on young women, leaving research on trafficked boys almost non-existent (Bhabha, p. 146).

A published report by HAGAR and World Vision referred to this “denial of victim status” as the “feminization of victimization” (p. 135). Although advances have been made in recent years in the critical approaches regarding "gender" in humanitarian settings (Schulz, 2019, p. 3), some researchers insist that applying a "gender perspective" usually translates into the needs and vulnerabilities of females (Theidon, 2007, as cited in Schulz, 2019, p. 3). Additionally, it is argued that the use of the term “gender-based” is restricted to social norms ascribed and predominantly used against female victimization, in turn leaving little-to-no room for the gender analysis of SGBV against males (Stemple,

2009, p. 619). As a result, Ní Aoláin, O'Rourke, and Swaine (2015) argued that a “tailored intervention to address male-centred sexual harms remains elusive and marginalized” (as cited in Schulz, 2019, p. 5).

A report released by the IASC (2015) highlighted that not only can men and boys become victims of SGBV, but that the terms “GBV” and “violence against women” are often used synonymously (p. 7). Such terminological matters seem to be a common characteristic among SGBV conversations — although “gender” is used neutrally and males can be victims of SGBV in specific contexts, the term is usually applied explicitly to females. Such ambiguity may very well cast a shadow over the advancements that need to be forged to address SGBV perpetrated against all victims adequately. Using “gender-based violence” and “violence against women” interchangeably and to define one another perpetuates the belief that only females can be impacted by SGBV (Stemple, p. 620), thus helping to continue the stigma associated with males experiencing similar incidents.

Stemple (2009) offers a simple yet insightful explanation as to why GBV is associated primarily with females: Decades of neglecting women’s needs in humanitarian settings have resulted in the common practice of using a “female-specific approach” (p. 627). As a result, “gender” has, in many ways, become synonymous with female-specific concerns, resulting in little discussion when it comes to males and SGBV (Stemple, 2009, p. 628). In addition, due to status and societal differentials, their “victim” status makes them seem like more authentic refugees (Jensen, 2019, p. 3).

## Gendered Stereotypes

Over the years, aggressive and predatory male stereotypes have been emphasized in official reports from various well-known organizations, consequentially leading to the omission of male victims throughout SGBV research. In one such report, a World Bank (WB) document was referenced concerning “gender inequalities,” which failed to mention males, regardless of age. Instead, the WB report referred to men in the context of their “destructive” behavior and included a section titled “Men behaving badly” (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 51).

Current SGBV discussions tend to portray males in dual roles — the perpetrator or the victim — but are overwhelmingly discussed in terms of the former. A GBV AoR report (2021) discussed males “who are at particular risk of sexual violence by other men” (p. 5) and identified several groups of males who are most likely to be victimized (such as the disabled), none of which included UASB.<sup>18</sup> To reference only “men” rather than using a gender-neutral term such as “perpetrator” can cause providers to overlook female perpetrators of SGBV, while simultaneously rendering males as constant offenders, inadvertently stripping them of their potential “victim” status.

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<sup>18</sup> For more information regarding referenced at-risk groups, please visit: [https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2021-11/Guidance%20Note%20Male%20Survivors\\_FINAL29.9.21.pdf](https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2021-11/Guidance%20Note%20Male%20Survivors_FINAL29.9.21.pdf).



## Gender Exclusion

... most of the talk I heard during my work was about the protection of women or girls rather than the other gender. - *KR #11*

An underlying proponent of male-victim denial seemingly stems from what could be deeply rooted ideologies of gender competitiveness, which at times can equate to sexism against males. Some researchers and humanitarians suggest that legitimate concerns for female populations hinder the recognition of male vulnerabilities due to unsupported and misguided beliefs that recognizing male victims will decrease vital resources for female victims.

A 2017 UNHCR regional report on the sexual exploitation of males featured the following response from a child protection officer regarding exclusion of male victims:

I've heard GBV specialists here say the focus has to be on women and girls – I've heard this explicitly said. It surprised me. I'm not of the same view. This attitude from someone from a UN agency who is in the position to fund programmes, who has power - that is concerning. It's the institutional stance that is concerning (p. 62).

Similar experiences highlighted in Key Respondent Spotlights and informants from other research indicate a concern of potential intentional oversight of male SGBV victims in a precarious and misaligned attempt not to divert attention and limited resources away from females. Protecting funds for female-specific initiatives and research seems to be a common concern within the humanitarian sector, and understandably so: female SGBV responses are underfunded, understaffed, and struggle to provide adequate and timely responses. Still, some humanitarians insist that concerns for female SGBV should not come at the expense of male SGBV victims. As one protection officer responded in the UNHCR report (2017) stated:

This mentality that ‘inclusion [of males] means exclusion [of females]’ needs to be pushed against...We need to move beyond that, to have a feminist framework that includes working with men and boys... (p. 60)

Interestingly, the same UNHCR report (2017) addressed the following consideration: “Again, clarity is needed regarding whether and to what extent the SGBV sector should address SVM<sup>19</sup> or if another sector is better positioned” (p. 63). This observation can be broken-down into the following three questions:

1. Since no specific gender is associated with what is initially presented as a gender-neutral term (“sexual gender-based violence”), why would the general SGBV sector not address male victims? (Rather than, for example, use gender-distinct terminology such as “female sexual gender-based violence” or “FSGBV” and “male sexual gender-based violence” or “MSGBV”).
2. Why is there a separate term for sexual violence against males (SVM), but not for sexual violence against females (SVF)?
3. Why would “another” sector be created for male victims of SGVB? What does “another” sector mean in this context, and is it within the SGBV periphery?

This ideology was repeated once more in an GBV AoR report (2021) regarding addressing the needs of male SGBV survivors. The following regarding GBV and males was stated:

There is debate within the GBV community on whether sexual violence against men and boys constitutes a form of GBV...The term ‘GBV’ is most commonly used to underscore how systemic inequality between males and females—which exists in every society in the world—acts as a unifying and foundational characteristic of most forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls. Forms of violence perpetrated

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<sup>19</sup> Sexual violence against males.

against men because they are men are not based on this systemic inequality (pp. 2, 20)

Discrepancies and myths regarding males and GBV, including the belief that males do not suffer acts of violence due to their gender or are ever at a gender-based disadvantage, seem widespread among providers and actors. Misconceptions can be disproven by referencing cases of sexual violence suffered by males during times of conflict, where males are targeted explicitly by sexual violence to emasculate and dominate them. Such cases perpetrated against males meet two out of the three forms that GBV can occur under.<sup>20</sup>

It would seem more prudent to break down genders within the SGBV sector rather than cultivate detached approaches that may further drive the ideology that males are not victims of SGBV. Since experiences of SGBV in complex emergencies can (and do) differ by gender and age, distinct breakdowns for considerations within SGBV discussions are essential to include, as such experiences will ultimately shape governmental and humanitarian strategies. Contrary to some suggestions, excluding male victims from SGBV conversations will lead to "gender" becoming officially synonymous with "female." Then what of gender-neutral approaches? One can argue that using terms such as "people" or "person" will remain inclusive to those with diverse identity backgrounds. However, exclusive words such as "women," "female" and "girls" continue to, directly and indirectly, dominate SGBV conversations.

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<sup>20</sup> As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, GBV can occur in three forms: 1) randomly (e.g., when the displaced are in transit or re-settle in insecure locations); 2) opportunistically (e.g., transactional sex); or 3) systematically (to cause humiliation or shame).

It is paramount to stop and acknowledge that females are highly likely to become victims of various forms of SGBV, especially during times of humanitarian crises. Current statistics not only illustrate this, but the precise numbers of victims are much likely considerably higher than reported (as under-reporting plagues both male and female victims). However, actors must come to terms with the realization that conversations within the SGBV sector are falling short of broadly recognizing males as vulnerable to similar experiences. As KR Mark Kavenagh, Head of Research for ECPAT International, stated for this research:

Girls and women are disproportionately affected by sexual and gender-based violence, so it does make sense that response and prevention has a focus on them. This should not be a competition for funds or attention. However, as awareness grows of how boys and men are affected, gender-sensitive approaches are also needed to support prevention and response for this cohort.

According to one WRC study (2018), key informants reported a "reluctance from GBV and child protection actors to recognize or respond to sexual violence against males." One GBV officer stated: "It's seen that we must get this [GBV response for women and girls] right first, then we can do that [address sexual violence against men and others]. But we can't do them in parallel." Another GBV officer featured in the study stressed that male victims need to be addressed globally, but the issue of males will continue to be "sidelined" due to the many response gaps that persist for females (pp. 40-41). Stemple (2009) illustrated this persistent concern by referencing that out of the 4,076 NGOs worldwide that address rape during times of conflict and political sexual violence, only 3% mentioned the experiences of males in their informative notes, and "typically as a passing reference" (p. 612). One example of such brevity comes from a UNHCR document (2016) which mentioned that "in some situations men themselves face sexual

violence” (p. 16). Although these comments are not explicitly regarding UASB and refugee camp settings, they reflect recurrent dogmas regarding male victims of SGBV.

In a 2014 report by Barbelet, the following observation was made:

At a recent roundtable on sexual violence against men and boys, I was very surprised to hear that some humanitarian organisations were reluctant to include men and boys in gender and gender-based violence programming. Sexual and gender-based violence is rightly gaining greater attention on a global level, with high-level events such as last week’s Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflicts, but discussions about sexual violence in conflict overwhelmingly tend to focus on women and girls as victims and men as perpetrators (pp. 2-3).

### Gender Indifference

According to researchers Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerlem, studies into the social perceptions on the sexual exploitation of children have “provided empirical evidence that gender norms are contributing to a lower recognition of boys’ victimization in comparison to that of girls” (p. 5). In a UNHCR study (2017), 57.6% of survey respondents believed that males were “not at all at risk” or “at little risk” to sexual exploitation in their settings. Almost half of the respondents reported that SVM was a “low or very low priority” among SGBV actors in their settings (p. 60). Additionally, what is referred to as the “masculinisation of perpetration” (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 168) continuously perpetuates norms that females are victims (Stemple, 2009, p. 606) and males are perpetrators, leading to dangerous and consequential narratives in SGBV discourse.

Case Reference: Brazil

A 2009 and 2010 Brazilian study referenced by researchers concluded that the sexual exploitation of females was perceived through a “victimizing gaze” while

victimized boys were looked upon with “indifference” (Segundo, Nascimento, Araújo & Moura, 2012, p. 35). Such persistent and consequential gender norms maintain the notion that males have more agency and control over their experiences than females (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerlem, p. 7), inadvertently diminishing males' potential for victimhood.

#### Case Reference: Europe

Research suggests that people in Europe tend to perceive lone males traveling throughout the region as less physically and emotionally vulnerable than females, including government officials who have imposed confining policies impacting migrating males (Arsenijević et al., p. 86). These males, including UASB, are frequently depicted as deceptive, criminal, or hypersexual and are considered a threat to European societies (Arsenijević et al., p. 92). According to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, 2013) research, males traveling alone are already in a vulnerable state of hopelessness and anxiety, which further exposes them to protection risks (as cited in Arsenijević et al., p. 86).

## Chapter XI.

### Organizational Deficiencies

*...the genesis of GBV work was all about women and girls and, as such, there is reluctance from many of those early champions to broaden out S/GBV to cover men and boys.... If boys are not included in how many define GBV, they're not going to look for and will not be prepared to respond when they find it. [The under-representation of UASB can lead to] limited evidence of incidence and, hence, little to no effort to inform policies and donor priorities. [Advancements can be made with] more case management systems and support for unaccompanied minors, regular monitoring, safe shelters, standard protocols. Child protection actors need to be resourced to provide comprehensive, wrap around services for these populations.*

- KR: Dale Buscher, VP of Programs, WRC

Regardless of age or gender, all refugees face immeasurable obstacles due to their legal status and the general stigma associated with being a “refugee.” Some of the most challenging aspects of refugee life are those associated with the lack of access to services and programs for those who have experienced sexual exploitation and SGBV. Available programs tend to run ineffectively and are rarely adequately designed for POM or children (IFRC, 2018, p. 18), with many being under-funded and fragmented (WRC, 2019, March, p. 54). In addition to difficulty finding appropriate outlets for victims in general, UASB face numerous gender-specific difficulties to disclosure. Although SGBV specialists have spent years developing programs to provide safe, conducive conditions for females (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 30), male-specific programs have struggled to come to fruition, with significantly fewer services available for sexually exploited boys

(UNICEF, 2020, p. 12). Field workers often lack proper training and materials (WRC, 2019, March, p. 54) to respond effectively to the specific needs of UASB.

The humanitarian system may be regarded as an assembly of organizations establishing material and non-material resources to provide service and protection to reduce despair and aid recovery (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8). Contrary to this, some researchers have argued that the “modern humanitarian system” is fraught with problematic ideologies regarding male victims (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8). Restrictive definitions and policy writing that synonymized SGBV with violence against females have resulted in disparities in the allocation of humanitarian assistance to male victims, including highly vulnerable UASB (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8).

Planning and implementing prevention and support mechanisms for sexual exploitation are usually based on anecdotal evidence rather than accurate statistics and real-world results (IASC, 2005, p. 25). According to an IFRC study (2018), efforts to identify and protect children during migration crises are slow to emanate (p. 18). Many contributing researchers to the study concurred that by the time proper systems were implemented, at-risk children had already moved on or “disappeared from the view of formal support systems,” and in worst-case scenarios, had already fallen victim to exploitation (p. 18). Services, including identification and monitoring of UASC, are labor-intensive, especially for camps with high numbers of vulnerable populations (UNHCR, 2006, p. 96). As Bhabha stated, even with identified victims, services are so difficult to access that in “practice they are illusory” (p. 161).



Barriers to services and accessibility include a lack of coordination between actors and bureaucratic health care systems that create challenging administrative networks for UASB to navigate (WRC, 2019, March, p. 57). Overwhelming organizational shortcomings lead to a perpetual cycle of sparse outreach, unavailable services and scarce reporting mechanisms that help reinforce the misconception that sexual violence perpetrated against males is “rare” (Jensen, 2019).

In settings where males constitute a majority of UASC, although many of the services are geared towards boys, including drop-in centers, outreach, and education programs, few of the existent services support or identify boys who have been victimized by or are at risk of sexual exploitation (WRC & UNICEF, pg. 11). For the few existing programs that offer support or reporting services for male victims, several focal administrative and structural concerns should be cited (WRC and UNICEF, 2021, p. 11):

1. Negative attitudes by service providers (such as homophobia, discrimination, xenophobia, disbelief, embarrassing comments, etc.).
2. Limited training for staff on the specific risks, needs and support of male victims.
3. Limited male-specific entry points for victims, as service locations tend to be female-oriented. Male victims may not be comfortable enough to approach such service locations, while males present in service areas could deter female victims from seeking said services.
4. Deficient or non-existent referral systems that cause victims to repeatedly describe their account can unintentionally lead to disclosure fatigue, possibly resulting in victimized UASB preferring to keep silent rather than go through a gauntlet of questions.

Programs for UASB need to be accessible and approachable to increase actual utilization of services, although frequently that is not the case, as reported by a KR for this study:

...the majority of the boys are not aware of their rights and do not know how to claim them, they often do not speak English or the local languages, so they are unable to communicate with the authorities or the staff, therefore they are unable to get the information on their rights and who to report the violence and exploitation to.

KR: Irena Abdelmaksoud, Protection Officer  
and UASC, Specialist, Info Park

### Awareness and Prevention

Awareness-raising campaigns are of significance when it comes to the sexual exploitation risks faced by UASB, who tend to be unaware of available services and support (if they exist) (WRC & UNICEF, p. 22). Many UASB may not understand what sexual exploitation involves, that males can be at risk of such experiences or wrongly assume it impacts only women and girls (WRC & UNICEF, p. 22). UASB may be unaware of the physical and emotional impacts sexual exploitation and SGBV can have on them and how crucial it is for them to access proper care (WRC & UNICEF, p. 22). Since many UASB may not be cognizant that, as males, they can fall victim to such acts, those exposed to sexual exploitation may feel that their experiences are “unique,” in turn making them afraid and embarrassed to disclose such information (WRC & UNICEF, p. 22).

Empowerment and prevention are skills taught in the hopes that young boys will be able to “recognize and navigate risks in their environment” (Alrabe et al., 2017).

According to research conducted by UNHCR, male adult refugees referenced a “lack of

sexual and reproductive health knowledge as an enabling factor” to an increase in the sexual exploitation of boy refugees; in addition to boys having “little knowledge of sexuality...including what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate touching” (UNHCR, 2017, p. 30). While some prevention efforts have begun to take shape, effective intervention attempts to prevent sexual exploitation from the onset struggle to manifest (UNHCR, 2017, p. 47). Moreover, although measures to reach boys in refugee communities are being established in some settings (e.g., drop-in youth centers and life skills workshops), they are usually not directed at preventing sexual exploitation (WRC, 2019, March, p. 57). Programs for adolescent boys continue to be minimal and do not include SGBV or reproductive health components (UNHCR, 2017, p. 48). There remains a social taboo in many settings regarding educating children about appropriate sexual behaviors. A lack of general sexual education, combined with online pornography, leads to confusion about sexual behaviors and creates a culture of shame and silence (UNHCR, 2017, p. 54).

### Funding and Donors

Funding for services is regularly a top priority for organizations, for, without financial support, services could not exist. Lack of proper funding for necessary SGBV programs is a universal issue impacting countless victims of all ages and genders (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 30). Reception centers, clinics, and other service sites are frequently understaffed, under-trained, and underpaid (WRC, 2019, March, p. 56). According to researchers, between 2016 to 2018, only 0.1% of humanitarian funding was allocated for GBV programs, while 2/3 of requested GBV associated funding remained unfunded (Voice & IRC, 2019, as cited in Touquet et al., 2020, p. 30). Lack of funding or

inadequate allocation, in correlation with little oversight of ground services, result in scarce or inconsistent services (Bhabha, p. 161). Furthermore, although the lack of resources impacts services for all victims, with the allotment of financial investments primarily focusing on female-specific programs (Jensen, 2019), funding for male-specific initiatives is challenging to attain. As KR Irena Abdelmaksoud insisted, when it comes to funding male-specific services for victims of sexual exploitation, “male survivors are often at the bottom of the priority list.”

Significant contributors to insufficient funding have been the lack of reliable data and limited evidence-based research that, if available, would be used to persuade governments, foundations, and donors to invest resources (Kara, 2017, October, p. 18; UNHCR, 2017, p. 62) geared towards male victims of SGBV. Donors are not sensitized to male SGBV and tend to prioritize programs that focus on women and girls (UNHCR, 2017, p. 63), which they find more desirable from a victim-based approach. Due to the general concern of limited funding for SGBV endeavors, a lack of cooperation between various organizations has evolved. As a result, “competition rather than cooperation” has led to limited communication and distrust (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 163), further hampering the development and implementation of services.

Donor ignorance, political perspectives, power differentials, and organizational culture can considerably impact funding — ultimately influencing the success of approaches and services. In addition to competition for funds, “donor colonialism,” involving a lack of situational and cultural awareness from donors, tends to concentrate on the number of services rather than their quality (HAGAR & World Vision, p.163).

Figure 11.2 provides an interesting example of how donor expectations can lead to organizational complications.

#### Figure 11.1: Cambodia – Donor Demands

One prime example that illustrates this dilemma is in Cambodia, where staff has reported complying with donor wishes (or demands) even though those actions are inappropriate for Cambodian society and hesitate to question donors (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 163). Often, donor demands and requests can stifle creativity and flexibility (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 163). A respondent in Cambodia explained: “Donors in effect run programmes, and we are driven by the agenda of someone in the USA or Europe with no sense of the reality of the situation” (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 163).

#### Health Facilities and Staffing

In crises settings, such as refugee camps, health services are often under intensified and escalating pressure. They tend to be viewed as unwelcoming by young people due to potential bias and negative attitudes from providers (IASC, 2020, p. 132). Dependent on the context of the emergency, medical and mental health services in camps are contingent on the degree of donor funding and organizational capacity and preferences (Vann, 2002, p. 14). In Greece, where an overwhelming number of UASC are boys, researchers concluded that health and protection measures focusing on UASB were not prioritized in neither humanitarian nor GBV services and that the specific needs of UASB were “among the least addressed” (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle,

pp. 8-9). When medical care is available to UASB, it is often inconsistent and varies from provider to provider.

Medical clinics are a critical component of refugee camp settings, especially for male SGBV victims. An earlier finding indicated that victimized boys usually approach services concerning issues other than their sexual exploitation (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 174). Male victims often wait until they need medical care due to the physical effects of an incident to approach services (GBV AoR, 2021, p. 6). Further research has highlighted that male victims prefer to seek resources outside of GBV service points, including those that provide integrated care for victims of violence, including mental health clinics (as opposed to SGBV care specifically) (GBV AoR, 2021, pp. 10, 13). Such factors could result from the lack of SGBV services or suitable male-specific entry points, making options for male victims extremely limited outside of medical facilities.

Sexist and discriminatory rhetoric from service providers against male victims, including the damaging notion that males cannot be victims of sexual exploitation and SGBV, or do not need services for their experiences, create an unwelcoming atmosphere that deters UASB from approaching medical clinics (GBV AoR, 2021, p. 14). When a UASB does decide to seek medical attention, providers may not always assume to question a UASB when physical signs of abuse are present during the evaluation and may rush through the examination process in some incidents. A problematic field concern highlighted in an MSF report (2019) indicated that interviews in service locations are often “conducted hastily,” with some lasting only 30 minutes and at times with no interpreter present (MSF, 2019, pg. 1).

Medical services in camp settings are often plagued with inconsistencies and vary from one medical provider to another, resulting in ineffective care coordination and referral systems (MSF, 2019). One such detrimental inconsistency is that some providers treat UASB as minors while others treat them as adults (MSF, 2019), ultimately impacting service referrals. To further complicate matters, some health providers may also refuse to treat refugees due to bias or xenophobia, even if they are children and are legally required to do so (WRC, 2019, March, p. 54).

Proper SGBV services for female and male victims need significant strengthening across most settings (WRC, 2018, p. 41). According to the WRC (2018), many service providers are deficient in “training, sensitization and experience” to provide proper care for victims (p. 41). A lack of adequately trained cultural mediators and interpreters will impede UASB’s willingness and ability to seek assistance and support (WRC, 2019, March, p. 54). KR Mark Kavenagh, Head of Research for ECPAT International, shared concern for lack of staff training with those who encounter UASB: “This issue is gaining in attention, but policy and practice responses are still limited, and frontline staff lack access to training and support for working with boys.”

Many staff have difficulty identifying and comprehending the diverse and complex needs of UASB (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 145). In contrast, staff who have some knowledge of male SGBV are often isolated and rarely receive proper training or clinical supervision to develop effective and long-term support services (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 10). Respondents in a study by the WRC (2018) expressed concern about providers’ “poor adherence to principles of confidentiality” and a “perceived empathy gap” that hampers their capacity to design appropriate programs (p. 41).

When health professionals encounter male SGBV victims, they frequently do not provide appropriate treatment because they are often “not trained to recognize the physical sequelae” of male victims (Carlson, 1997, as cited in Stemple, 2009, p. 612). While some providers receive training on child mental health from well-known organizations, reports indicate this training was generalized and many times failed to consider boys altogether, in addition to rarely receiving follow-up supervision to help reinforce training (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 146). In the few circumstances where training is specific to male SGBV, providers lack practical experiences to reinforce their training, while using indicators on males is infrequent (UNHCR, 2017, p. 50). As KR Irena Abdelmaksoud from Info Park (Serbia) highlighted, although sexually exploited boys “decided to report the exploitation when they felt they trusted the authorities or the staff in the field,” it remained common that “most of the staff working with refugee children are not trained to recognize the indicators that boys might be at risk of SE [sexual exploitation].”

Training deficiencies also include a lack of cultural awareness and understanding by those who interact with multi-cultural communities. Few organizations are properly trained in transcultural communication and how to be sensitive to communities from different cultures (WRC, 2019, March, p. 54), resulting in poorly designed programs and services that are “culturally insensitive” and undermine the wellbeing of the community they serve (Sereda, 2021, p. 4). In addition, expectations of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and sexism by staff cause additional barriers to UASB seeking support (WRC, 2019, March, p. 54), causing a delay in care and heightened exposure to additional sexual exploitation.



## Gender Specificities

Male victims of SGBV comprise a group with their uniqueness, requiring adequate and gender-specific programs and services tailored to their needs. While some programs vary in their degree of integrating males into their services (UNHCR, 2017, p. 43), the general lack of reported incidents from sexually exploited males has resulted in hesitation from some providers on whether such services are needed — an argument that echoes earlier resistance to establish services for females (WRC, 2018, p. 42).

Due to the myriad of risks and vulnerabilities, initiatives not tailored with gender-specific responses may result in a low success rate. Appropriate responses cannot be accomplished with “gender-neutral” or “gender-blind” programs; replicating services designed for females or by simply “adding” males to existing programs tailored for females in highly gender-segregated communities not only fails to address the specific needs of males but also compromises care for women (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 31; UNHCR, 2017, p. 54). KR Carina Hickling, coordinator for CASI at the UN, touched upon this by stressing that “...gender blindness is not helpful as the needs are different, and the risk plays out differently.”

As previously discussed, a lack of male-specific entry points has been sighted as a significant deterrent for male victims, as many feel uncomfortable or unable to access assistance in settings that offer SGBV services, primarily in the form of women-friendly spaces (WRC, 2018, p. 42). In a WRC (2018), an informant stressed: “It is such a failure of the [Humanitarian Response Plan] not to have considered entry points for male survivors in this crisis” (p. 42). Currently, existing male-specific services are generally not designed to be boy-friendly (UNICEF, 2020, p. 12) and, more so, are not capable of

dealing with the challenges that are specific to UASB. These services are primarily intended for adult males, leaving some providers unsure of where to refer UASB (UNICEF, 2020, p. 12) to assess their physical and emotional needs.

Existing programs consist of predominantly female staff members, many of whom do not have experience with men and boy victims of sexual exploitation and SGBV (Jensen, 2019). Such approaches are destined to fail, forcing many victims to refrain from disclosing their experiences. One such example of this problematic approach is in Lebanon, where various organizations, such as the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and UNHCR, have created male-focused centers primarily focusing on SGBV prevention services, but consist of an overwhelmingly female-based staff who are not “sensitized” to male victims of SGBV (UNHCR, 2017, p. 43). Figure 11.2 highlights the concerning practices reported from service providers in the Middle East regarding “existing” male services.

### Figure 11.2: Middle East – Checkmark the Box

In a UNHCR (2017) study in refugee camps throughout the ME, one respondent shared an insightful yet alarming concern regarding male-specific programming: an NGO director in Lebanon stated, “We just add men and boys to a proposal to look good. It’s just a sentence - no one really cares about it” (p. 63). On a similar note, a SGBV officer in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) reported:

Some agencies have increased attention [to men and boys] at their centres, but not to actual SGBV services – they just broadened the name. Men and boys benefit from centre activities, but not case management. Then they [agencies] can tick the box for men and boys, but it’s not male survivors coming forward (p 79).

Research has indicated issues regarding SGBV against men and boys are not sufficiently contemplated in humanitarian design (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8). A major contributing component to these issues is the restrictions of scarce resources and sparsity of gender-sensitive approaches that include detection of sexually exploited UASB (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8). In locations where programs are male-specific, they are not advertised as such and, as a result, leave many male refugees unaware of the existence of such services (WRC, 2018, p. 42). Due to the lack of services and distrust in disclosure, agencies do not have a sense of “urgency” (WRC, 2018, p. 31) to provide services in what seems to be a perpetual cycle of disregard).

There are few mitigation strategies [to protect UASB]. [The issue is] vastly underestimated and neglected....as it is not part of standard indicators. [It is] important to understand risk but not in competitive terms with that of women and girls...services to boys are not 'counted', not included in indicators/donor reporting [due to the] fear that attention directed to address boys would take away hard won advances for addressing GBV affecting women and girls...Political stance is more evident at global levels...it is more a political issue where a particular form of feminism is seeing this as a threat to the work for women and girls. In other settings, such as with UN battalions - there might be a heteronormative culture that prevents recognition of sexual violence perpetrated against boys.... Overall, I believe funding is allocated to what 'we know' to be the risks. The problem is that our understanding of the needs must be refined to adequately reflect the situation for both boys and girls.

KR: Carina Hickling  
Child Protection Area of Responsibility (AoR)  
Coordinator, Child and Adolescent Survivor Initiative (CASI),  
United Nations (UN)

[The risks of sexual exploitation inside camp settings] varies by individual situation. Both girls and boys are targeted. Where there are large numbers of one gender that is likely to be represented in the risk to exploitation...Overall, protection systems are not as well equipped to support boys as they are for girls. Also, it can be harder to gather information on boys because of gender norms and other barriers... Generally, lots to improve. [Under-reporting by UASB is due to] gender norms and barriers... [including staff not] trained or equipped to support boys...[UASB] are not seen as potential targets, and the fear of becoming locked into formal government systems, and the accompanying concern of being sent home [impacts disclosure].

Males/boys are far too often left out [of SGBV conversations] ...The imbalance might derive from the reality that day-to-day girls do face higher risks to SGBV. So that gets translated as an assumption into refugee and migration settings. Because so many women and girls have fought so well and bravely against SGBV for so long there is also just a higher understanding of the risk against women and girls compared to boys...for which the recognition is still developing...[Our organization] has community engagement and accountability posts to hear from the community about issues [and] often conduct focus groups with community leaders and NGOs, [but we] need to do more on direct focus groups with children....Referral pathways are in place and communicated [between teams for situations involving sexual exploitation].

[There is an attempt to] reflect the reality when it comes to UASB and their risks of sexual exploitation we all have blind spots and might have inherent biases... We have a considerable amount to do.

KR: Gurvinder Singh, Senior Advisor, Child Protection and Safeguarding,  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

## Chapter XII.

### Moving Forward

*The levels of investment in preventing and responding to sexual abuse or exploitation – whether experienced by boys, girls, or women - are extremely low and come nowhere near close to meeting the needs. Additional funding is needed, and broadly speaking humanitarian organisations must live up to their commitments to prevent and respond to all forms of sexual violence.*

- KR #12

The humanitarian field is inundated with numerous recommendations, protocols, and calls-to-action on responding to sexual exploitation in crisis settings, yet impactful follow-through on large-scale proportions seems to elude most responses. When it comes specifically to UASB and sexual exploitation in camp settings, some generalized recommendations and guidelines can assist providers to better prepare for such circumstances. Evolving prevention and post-care models come with enlightened and culturally sensitive approaches that can be used as templates to either expand upon or newly create programs uniquely customized for UASB (in general and those throughout camp settings). It is essential to acknowledge that although there are many facets to the approaches that can be executed to tackle the detrimental issue of sexual exploitation during complex emergencies, no distinct formula would apply in its entirety in all settings. Solutions, in theory, might be easy to establish but must be pragmatic enough to be applicable in practice.

Numerous governments have created protocols about protecting vulnerable populations yet do not strictly enforce them, while in some locations, they are entirely in

contradiction to a state's actions against vulnerable groups. Regarding state actors, considerations on matters such as sovereignty must be realistically examined to achieve successful real-world applications. Rather than discuss theoretical approaches concerned with political aspects, this chapter will present reasonable, practical approaches applicable to services and SGBV discussions.

### Statistical Considerations

Although advocacy against sexual exploitation should not solely depend on statistics, as one victim is too many, it is still essential to identify and acknowledge quantitative elements to help establish proper responses. Data collection regarding victims of sexual exploitation and SGBV can be difficult to obtain due to various factors, including the unwillingness of many victims to come forward with their experiences and confidentiality-related considerations. There are ways to maneuver such obstacles, including sharing and compiling anonymous incident reports that protect victims' identities while providing much-needed quantitative data to help strengthen prevention and care services (IASC, 2005, p. 33). Physical and mental health clinics and other UASB services may develop a central information collection mechanism directly connected to SGBV services. What that degree of information consists of should depend on the relative size of the camp and the population served. For example, data accumulated may show discrepancies or changes, especially those related to UASC populations, raising red flags for providers. One such system that has already been implemented is the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBV

IMS),<sup>21</sup> which allows providers working with victims of SGBV to collect, store, analyze, and share information on reported incidents. The SGBV IMS is currently executed in 26 countries to allow users to collect vital data (UNHCR, 2017, p. 40).

Still, data should not be the primary gauge providers use to determine needs. As the WRC (2018) reported, interagency guidelines that state that services for all victims should be implemented “with or without incident data” (p. 42). It is worth noting that the IASC’s GBV Guidelines (2015) state that humanitarian actors should “assume gender-based violence is occurring and threatening affected populations” and that they should react “regardless of the presence or absence of concrete evidence” (Jensen, 2019). Therefore, it would be critical for actors to assume that SGBV and exploitation in camps also impact UASB regardless of personal assumptions or available data.

Unfortunately, deficiency in data has impeded efforts to convince governments and donors to sufficiently invest attention and funds to male focused SGBV initiatives (Kara, 2017, October, p. 18). Spotlighting evidence of male victims with the use of data is essential to access funding (UNHCR, 2017, p. 63); although this can be a perpetual cycle of frustration and little results.

#### Awareness and Identification: Visionary Approaches

The first step in combating sexual exploitation is preventing its onset. Although it can be difficult to create programs for POM and refugee populations, successful exploratory campaigns have had promising results. A 3-pronged approach to combatting

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<sup>21</sup> For more information, please visit: <https://www.gbvims.com>.



exploitation (incl. trafficking) is recognized by the Palermo Protocol, including public awareness campaigns that stress prevention and constitute a victim-centered approach to combat exploitation. The Palermo Protocol suggests that “State parties shall endeavour to undertake measures such as research, information and mass media campaigns . . . [t]o prevent and combat trafficking in persons” (Bhabha, p. 162). Organizations must implement awareness-raising campaigns, including those within programs and services, that meaningfully engage with boys to educate them on the risks of sexual violence (WRC, 2021, p. 30).

Due to the transient lifestyle of UASC, the best opportunity for possible identification of this vulnerable community would be at reception centers and camp settings. Ideally, UN-affiliated personnel should be responsible for this venture, as they are equipped to provide the staff needed to undertake the overwhelming task of registration and are the most well-known of organizations, which would help ease suspicions from the refugee community. Using government officials might deter some UASB from registering due to fears of being deported or detained. How often data should or can be collected is dependent on various factors — including how large the population of a camp is, how many UASC are in the camp, and what kind of funding and resources are available. Data on UASC should be collected regularly, preferably every two weeks, to make any concerning data trends noticeable to providers, such as a sudden drop in UASC numbers. Since many providers count the population they serve, it would be prudent for providers to communicate and share such valuable information.

## Imaginative Outreach

The implementation of posters, plays, and music can help send important and cautionary messages about the dangers of sexual exploitation to UASB, who can be more inclined to receive such warnings if promoted in creative and specifically targeted ways (as boys). Awareness campaigns should be developed with the specific consideration of gender to increase their receptiveness. As KR #2 stated in response to a question regarding gender-neutral approaches: "...a lot of our work is done through diagrams for a population with low literacy; the various people might not recognise themselves in the pictures if it was gender neutral - better to have both sexes depicted."

Since refugee camps tend to be chaotic and disorganized, imploring such techniques can send strong messages about tactics exploiters employ, in addition to encouraging UASB who have been victimized to come forward and seek help. Prevention initiatives should include booklets, handouts, and posters that are printed in the native language(s) of the refugee population and be promptly distributed throughout the community upon the erection of a campsite. Information should include the roles of power differentials, deceit, coercion, and fear in such circumstances (WRC, 2021, p. 34) but explained in ways that are child-friendly and not overly complicated to avoid confusion by those who read it. Booklet designs should be creative and include approaches that are ideal for engagement from children; cautionary storylines in the form of comic books with colorful pictures might be a way to encourage more interest from UASB. Figure 12.1 illustrates how ingenuity can be used to spread awareness and encourage disclosure.

Figure 12.1: Bangladesh – Artistic Outreach

Bangladeshi authorities and aid groups undertook one such initiative in Rohingya refugee camps, where comic books and street plays were created to help combat the rising rates of exploitation by serving as warnings to refugees, in addition to an increase of police presence. IOM reported that these activities had resulted in 420 cases of identified trafficking within a 6-month period (a fourfold increase from the previous 14 months) (Karim, 2019), in addition to helping countless refugees recognize the signs of potentially exploitative situations.

Technological approaches can include apps that can be downloaded onto mobile phones are a speedy and effortless way to spread messages of awareness and caution to UASC on the risks of sexual exploitation, in addition to helping them locate and connect with appropriate services. Figure 12.2 highlights how the use of apps can help transient populations of children safely find their way around Europe.

### Figure 12.2: Europe – Technology for Good

One such example is the app “Miniilia,” which informs transient children throughout Europe of the rights and services available to assist them, including connecting them with the 400 services available in 8 countries throughout the region (Missing Children Europe Annual Review, 2020). The app features Arabic, English, Farsi, French and Tigrinya languages to effectively communicate with children from various backgrounds, including countless refugee children (Missing Children Europe Annual Review, 2020). The promotion was carried out online and included explanatory videos and testimonials from migrant children to help encourage new users to download the app (Missing Children Europe Annual Review, 2020).

While mobile apps and websites are practical tools in combating sexual exploitation, not all UASB have access to technology. Providers should be mindful of such hurdles and incorporate the use of physically distributed materials throughout campsites to educate UASB (and the public) on the risks of sexual exploitation. Such materials should disclose available SGBV services, including locations and numbers to hotlines (if available). Although it is crucial to make all refugee community members aware of the risks they face, due to the misconceptions and gender stereotypes that boys in particular face, it is critical that awareness materials include messages directed specifically towards UASB. Providers should be mindful that recruitment exclusively through existing social services can isolate UASB who are not currently engaging in those particular social programs. Therefore, expanding outreach efforts is crucial.

## Concepts on Sexual Health

Sex education programming designed for boys can be a powerful tool against raising awareness within the UASB population on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate touching. Approaches should be conducive to acknowledging and being sensitive to cultural differences; considerations should be made in approaching what many refugee populations might consider taboo topics. It would be counterintuitive to design programs that providers personally find appropriate, but the local refugee population is not comfortable accessing, which can result in hesitancy on the part of UASB to approach such services. Figure 12.3 illustrates the importance of self-awareness and how discussing sexual health, even in its basic form, can help bring about disclosure from victims.

Religion and spirituality can play essential roles for many UASB, helping to serve as a positive coping mechanism for many victims; for others, such factors can instead leave them feeling alienated and increase their distress (WRC, 2021, p. 35). Including local religious and community leaders from within the refugee population can help alleviate misconceptions about sexual health from community members. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial for staff to meaningfully engage with local religious and community leaders to help increase awareness of the high risks of sexual exploitation against vulnerable populations within their communities, such as UASB. For those UASB who do not feel comfortable with religious community members, providers should work to provide alternative supportive social networks that can impart messages of awareness (WRC, 2021, p. 35).

### Figure 12.3: Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) – Raising Awareness

Some well-known organizations have created inclusive prevention programs that aim to educate young children about the dangers of sexual misconduct. Save the Children has implemented a youth resilience program for boys and girls in the KRI region that includes child protection materials referred to as “Safe You and Safe Me” (UNHCR, 2017, p. 47). In this program, gender, respect, and discussions on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate touching are explored (UNHCR, 2017, p. 47). Save the Children staff have reported that after sessions and review of the booklet materials, some boys have disclosed incidents of sexual exploitation (UNHCR, 2017, p. 48).

### Disclosure Preferences

Although disclosure is stressed throughout discussions on SGBV, not only is it not necessary in terms of recovery, but it may not be the safest or best option for a victimized UASB (WRC & UNICEF, p. 16). Disclosure of sensitive experiences such as sexual exploitation can lead to increased stress and trauma, especially in the unstable conditions of refugee camps. Additionally, forcing victims to go through a gauntlet of existing services could lead to “question-answering fatigue” and “over-interrogation,” possibly resulting in a UASB’s unwillingness to disclose experiences of sexual exploitation (UNICEF, 2020, p. 12).

Organizations must remember that boys sometimes tend to disclose their experiences months after initial contact and that patience, long-term approaches, and flexibility are vital to effective programming (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 174).

Although this can be challenging and frustrating when dealing with transient populations, it should not discourage organizations from implementing much-needed awareness campaigns to help facilitate disclosure.

Regardless, UASB are more likely to disclose to others if there is a high level of trust, regardless of the gender of the person receiving the information (Touquet, 2018, as cited in Touquet et al., 2020, p. 29). Disclosure is highly personal, and preference on the gender of the service provider is (and should be) a decision for the UASB to ultimately make for himself, rather than provider assumptions (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 29). The most important consideration by providers is to foster a safe, reliable, and trustworthy space that can help encourage disclosure (WRC & UNICEF, p. 16) when a UASB finally decides to come forth with his experience(s).

#### Clinics and Services: Pragmatic Approaches

According to a report by MSF (2021), 28% of sexual violence survivors who sought care in their medical clinic in Lesvos, Greece, were male (p. 7). This report highlights the importance of access to health clinics for male SGBV victims and the need for boy-specific services aimed at UASB populations throughout camp settings. Preventative and identification initiatives are of utmost importance but are rendered virtually useless if there are no services for victims to utilize. For victimized UASB, post-care follow-up is of foremost importance. Medical clinics and mental health services need to be immediately available, allowing for 24/7 access to care for victims.

## Case Reference: Italy

In Italy, where UASB populations are exceptionally high, some successful services have been created to help identify and protect boys from the many risks they face as UASC. In 2011, the Italian NGO INTERSOS opened a center for UASC in Rome that has assisted more than 6,000 individuals and included 24/7 access to a trained psychologist (WRC, 2019, March, p. 51). In 2009, Save the Children launched a drop-in day center known as “CivicoZero” to help provide protection and material support for minor refugees, many of them UASB (WRC & UNICEF, p. 20). These programs can have powerful positive outcomes for UASC, including lessening feelings of loneliness and isolation. When allowed to access available services without restricted hours, vulnerable populations might be more inclined to use them.

Not all male- or UASB-specific services need to be created from scratch, as some can be expanded upon or redesigned from existing programs that can be re-formulated to address male-specific issues and needs (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 177). Therefore, communication and cooperation between providers to exchange experiences with pragmatic approaches is key to creating successful services (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 177). A case-by-case victim-centered approach that also considers context can help ensure the development of sensitive responses. Individualized approaches require rigorous collaboratives to evolve and expand, including the need for sufficient funding and advocacy to continue such programs (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 31), but can profoundly impact individuals and communities. Reported experiences from frontline providers indicate that confidential services, along with sensitized community outreach, will be accessed by victims of all genders (Touquet et al., 2020, p. 30) if available.



Case Reference: CESVI (Italy)

The Italian organization CESVI provides various forms of assistance, including psychosocial and GBV support. In 2017, only six male victims had accessed their services. By October 2018, that number had tripled — an increase the NGO attributed an increase in male and female GBV case managers who commit themselves to confidentiality, respect, and a survivor-centered approach. The information regarding their services spread within the refugee population by word-of-mouth, resulting in males utilizing available services (WRC, 2019, March, p. 51).

However, just as important as the services are the people that staff them. According to the WRC and UNICEF (2021), boys “want to feel a sense of safety and need support and positive role models, such as guardians, mentors, and cultural mediators/ interpreters” (p. 16). Staff must be trained and sensitive to the specific needs of UASB and the multitude of challenges they face in camp settings. Reception areas for UASC should include both male and female staff who are adequately trained to refer UASB safely and confidentially to the appropriate services (WRC, 2021, p. 33). It should not be assumed whom a UASB would like to disclose experiences to, but rather have the boy decide for himself. Allowing UASB to “move at their own pace” and disclose the information they want to when they want is vital when building trustful relationships (WRC & UNICEF, p. 17). In addition to staff, services should also consider having male mentors from the local refugee community who can become role models and support UASB (WRC & UNICEF, p. 17). However, providers should consider implementing proper vetting techniques to protect UASB from being unintentionally exposed to exploiters who might pose as mentors.

Providers should also understand the relevance that culture, language, and religion can play in the lives of UASB. Since there is a high level of mistrust (and in some cases, distrust) against mental health services, providers should also consider having local religious and community leaders from within the refugee population engage in programs as an alternative approach to UASB (WRC & UNICEF, p. 11). Creating programs with linguistic, cultural, and religious mediators can profoundly impact UASB and staff relations, including increasing feelings of trust (WRC & UNICEF, p. 17).

The significance of confidentiality, respect, and cultural and gender sensitivity need to be continuously stressed to staff throughout such programs, including systematic training to re-strengthen values. Survivor-centered approaches can help ease fears of disclosure by showcasing to UASB that staff respects their privacy (WRC & UNICEF, p. 17). Just as important, staff need to express interest in the boys' lives and concern for their general wellbeing. Expressing sincere interest is integral to gaining trust from UASB, as many of them need trustworthy adults in their unstable lives. Evaluation of staff performances should be conducted regularly and include anonymous input and experiences from boys who have interacted with said staff.

To create an authentic environment that is safe for disclosure of sexual exploitation, staff need to acknowledge that SGBV can indeed occur against males and dismiss negative misconceptions that can deter UASB from disclosure, in addition to training on survivor-centered approaches in the context of applicable real-world scenarios (WRC & UNICEF, p. 17). Staff must not reinforce harmful gender stereotypes but instead help create respectful and equal gender norms that empower UASB to express their feelings rather than feel the need to uphold unrealistic expectations of being a

“man.” Regarding staff perspectives, training should include distinctions and the interrelatedness between gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, and SGBV to foster a sensitive and judgment-free environment for UASB, regardless of their victim status (UN, 2012, p. 11).

Due to the rise in interest in SGBV over the years, materials continue to evolve, with once practiced approaches becoming superfluous or inessential (Vann, 2002, p. 5). As crucial as it is for providers to be knowledgeable about sexual exploitation and SGBV regarding UASB, it is essential to note that these skills are taught and fine-tuned over time and experiences. Rather than staff and providers being discouraged and frustrated by their current lack of expertise, it is crucial to discontinue negative attitudes to provide proper interventions (UNHCR, 2017, p. 81).

#### Child & Gender-Specific Advances

According to the UNHCR, the needs and risks of unaccompanied migrating boys and girls differ from one another, and “in-depth gender and diversity analysis is needed to understand the specific and unique needs better” UASC face when it comes to SGBV (UNHCR, 2017, p. 9). Referral systems that identify UASB populations and those victimized by sexual exploitation must be sufficiently established. However, proper identification services alone will not suffice, as they also need to include elements that address boys’ physical, psychological, and sexual health needs that do not perpetuate unhealthy gender norms, such as victim-blaming or stigmatization (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, pp. 8).

Some researchers have argued for a multi-combination approach that involves factors such as those involving skills building and protection, including “community- or family-level protection in the absence of traditional support mechanisms” to safeguard vulnerable UASB (Alrabe et al., 2017). Such interactions and relations can be best formed within child-friendly spaces, adolescent clubs/groups, and sports programs (WRC, 2021, p.30), which can help reduce the risks of sexual exploitation, while providing safe spaces for UASB to engage in physically and psychologically healthy behaviors that help establish appropriate relationships with their peers.

When providers are in the planning stage of program design, it is vital to consider having alternative entry points for males to access services. If feasible, specific entry points for minors should be deliberated, as some UASB may feel uncomfortable accessing services around adult males. Providers should consider the diverse and distinct needs within the male population, including those of adolescent and pre-pubescent boys (GBV AoR, 2021, p. 10). It is also crucial to remember that spaces should feel welcoming to all UASB and not exclude those within a minority group, such as those who identify as part of the homosexual or transgender communities.

Field evidence suggests that when appropriately implemented, male-specific services provide a safe space for victims, such as UASB, by ensuring a dignified approach and a reduction of humiliation, which can help mitigate feelings of isolation (Touquet et al., 2020). Although, developing male-friendly entry points and services should never come at the expense of female-specific approaches (WRC, 2018, p. 42). Therefore, it is imperative to remember that services should include sexual and

reproductive services oriented towards males and females to expand awareness throughout high-risk population).

### Macro-Level Considerations: The 3C Approach

UNICEF insists that there is a “limited and shrinking space” for effective participation from organizations, including civil society and community representatives, which are “critical for child protection” (UNICEF, 2021, p. 3). According to the IFRC (2018), humanitarian agencies tend to work in “isolation” and “promote different approaches” (p. 18), resulting in confusion and gaps in treatments and services. It is imperative that providers of various programs — such as SGBV, health, protection, and education — communicate, coordinate, and collaborate closely to provide effective and wide-reaching services (Vann, 2002, p. 79). Although collaboration between various actors is not always easy or even desired (Vann, 2002, p. 80), it is essential to formulate cross-sectional approaches that manifest and maintain relationships to provide optimal quality of care and avoid unnecessary replication of services. Providers incorporating the 3-C approach can help create an impactful array of programs and services that consolidate practices, experiences, and knowledge from multiple sources. This approach can increase the success rate of field operations while lessening resentment and competition between actors, which can all distract from the quality of services provided. This approach should not be limited to providers and organizations, as states, especially those that share borders, would find great benefit in creating partnerships that help support initiatives that tackle local sexual exploitation of UASC.

Areas with high numbers of UASC (such as Greece and Italy) have seen a rise in grassroots organizations emerging to help with the overwhelming task of identification,

protection, and other services aimed at the vulnerable population, including those that provide food, recreational activities, legal aid, and integration support (WRC, 2019, March, p. 51). There is an unfortunate tendency for larger organizations to use the 3-C approach with other similar, more established organizations — choosing to overlook hardworking grassroots organizations due to their smaller size or lesser-known international reputation. As a result, many organizations unknowingly (or at times knowingly) duplicate services rather than share such efforts. Regardless of size, funding, or popularity, organizations should integrate their efforts to create accessible services and avoid duplication of work to lessen confusion within the UASB and general refugee communities.

Regardless of how many organizations are present on the ground or what niche of the population they serve, all actors should have weekly meetings to discuss their services and what possible joint ventures can be devised, in addition to exchanging relevant information about the populations they serve to have the most up-to-date information available for all providers. Creating joint projects can be mutually beneficial for all parties — smaller organizations receive funding and training from larger, more established organizations; larger organizations benefit by using the expertise and reputation of local grassroots organizations that have formed relationships with domestic and refugee communities.

### Hear Them Speak: Dialogue and Agency

Since boys have statistically proven to comprise a more significant portion of UASC in some contemporary complex settings, including indications of heightened risks of sexual exploitation, a revision of current literature and protocols is crucial.

Conversations surrounding males, sexual exploitation, and SGBV continue to be dominated by restrictive, ambiguous language and ideologies, leading to a contentious environment for all involved. Nevertheless, the most harmful consequences fall onto the men and boys overlooked as potential victims. As it currently stands, males have continued to be deprived of their victimhood, with merely fleeting sentences that note males as victims of SGBV and sexual exploitation.

Due to generalized or gendered risks that males are exposed to in specific settings, it would be advantageous for SGBV discussions to expand on conversations to include males as victims — rather than only consider them as agents of and solutions to SGBV. Updated discussions must include inclusive language and genuine approaches (rather than elusive ones) to discuss the risks of sexual exploitation and SGBV that boys, especially UASB, face in complex and emergency settings. Current dialogue needs to expand beyond non-sexual forms of exploitation, such as forced labor and boy soldiers, in addition to analyzing conditions outside of war and conflict settings; acknowledgment of the high risks that refugee dwellings can pose, such as unofficial squats along borders or officially designated camps, need to be further assessed. Although newly emerging research on the risks of sexual exploitation of males highlights risks of SGBV during en route migratory journeys, these studies tend to focus on adult males and overlook risks once refugees have reached campsites.

Educating donors and the public on the exponential risks of exposure UASB face and the need for male-specific SGBV services is essential to combat sexual exploitation. Additionally, and beyond the organizational scope, increasing recognition of and sympathies for male victims of sexual exploitation is a crucial component of public

consciousness. Creating awareness campaigns, such as social media ads and journalistic pieces that focus on the risks of sexual exploitation against males and UASB, can help heighten the urgency to create further research and male-oriented services.

Although it would be challenging to include UASB in the initial response phase of program designs, it is crucial to forming connections with UASB upon program initiation within camps. Designated outreach officers should be adequately trained in child-friendly approaches to locate UASB and facilitate provider-child relations. UASB should be encouraged to speak freely and provide feedback on current services in addition to programs they would like to see made available; providers should not assume that an approach that worked in one setting will work in another. Having minimum service standards is helpful, but providers should utilize the local population's opinions to provide beneficial and impactful care and services. Engaging with UASB by providing them the agency to use their voices to represent themselves is integral to successful approaches, including policy writing. Participation from UASB is a crucial element in the mapping of safety risks, as well as improving proper monitoring mechanisms (WRC, 2021, p. 31).

In recent years, organizations have made some compelling efforts to directly include children in a more hands-on approach to program development. Missing Children Europe has undertaken several initiatives that incorporate children in their developmental efforts, such as: designated Child Comms Expert group that involved five young people that had experience with “going missing” to co-develop a child-friendly section on their website; 16 young participants in the Lost in Migration youth conference to help co-design the development and messages presented in their 2021 edition report; and the



Young People's Board included ten youths experienced in running away to help co-steer the RADAR project, which includes research, campaigns and policy recommendations. Missing Children Europe also connects 31 grassroots organizations in 26 countries to combat sexual exploitation of children through prevention and support services, including a national 116000 service hotline for UASC that provides free and prompt 24/7 access to emotional, psychological, social, legal, and administrative support (Missing Children Europe Annual Review, 2020).

## Chapter XIII.

### Closing Remarks

*I believe the topic of this survey is very important and I wish to see more academic focus in these matters in the humanitarian field. I think regardless of the results toward more equality or more focus on certain gender, just having these healthy academical debates into the humanitarian field brings very good results that can help people in the field follow a more directed and professional humanitarian response.*

- KR #11

The astonishing and most likely under-reported number of UASC worldwide serves as a stark reminder of the unfathomable dangers children face from various forms of exploitation. For male victims, the continuous disregard for their sexual exploitation results in significant physical, emotional, and psychological ramifications, including ongoing trauma that can have life-long impacts — with nominally structured services and support to help victims process and endure (WRC, 2016, p. 7). The limited research reviewed in this study, including acquired insights from key respondents for this study, highlight alarming gaps that prove detrimental to vulnerable male populations impacted by SGBV.

Security and services for refugee camps are often discussed as assumptions, resulting in persistent disparities between considerations and implementation, leading to an environment that allows for rampant human rights violations against vulnerable refugees. As of now, there have been no genuine, large-scale efforts in evidence-based approaches geared towards the risks associated with the backdrop of inhumane and

unchecked camp settings that leave UASB susceptible to such cruelty. Although restrictive research indicates that UASB are exponentially at risk of sexual exploitation in such settings, it is hard to quantify to what degree this is occurring due to the lack of adequate analysis.

Across humanitarian settings, post-care services for victims of sexual violence, regardless of age or gender, are frequently weak and subpar (WRC, 2018, p. 40), leaving victims confused and unaware of what services are available (if any exist). According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), while services and support for female victims of sexual exploitation tend to exist, “however rudimentary,” the same cannot be said for males (1993, 1.4). For UASB, legal and social barriers, including gendered stereotypes, homophobia, biased legal frameworks, and limited funding, impede access to essential services, especially post-trauma care (UNHCR, 2014, p. 16). These vulnerabilities, including within their coping mechanisms, are also heavily impacted by gender-prejudiced social and provider views that can lead to profound consequences (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 9). Reluctant attitudes from organizations, providers, and policymakers have stifled research and limited approaches to combat the sexual exploitation of UASB, especially in vulnerable settings such as refugee camps. Many providers continue to underestimate the susceptibility of UASB and may be unsure of how to respond to such incidents when they present themselves (WRC & UNICEF, p. 11). According to research, the “lack of visibility and recognition in most cultures that males can be and are abused merely compound this view,” resulting in continuous silence and isolation from victims (HAGAR & World Vision, pp. 61, 168). Socio-cultural views on masculinity, sexuality, and structured gender norms, that also impact organizational attitudes can compound

during experiences of sexual exploitation and need to be deconstructed (Jensen, 2019, p. 8) to have effective and meaningful results within SGBV conversations and programming.

Revising humanitarian systems can bring about contemporary and innovative ways to implement gender-inclusive measures that address gaps in SGBV approaches and acknowledge the vulnerabilities of males without minimizing female-based efforts (Josenhans, Kavenagh, Smith & Wekerle, p. 8). In theory, although these might result in considerable beneficial changes, few genuine, impactful efforts have advanced in this regard. Inaccurate and negative attitudes against males in the context of SGBV must be corrected, as they impede advancements in research and services for male victims (UNHCR, 2017, p. 63). To make a significant shift in ideologies and approaches, the “donor and NGO subculture” that is perpetuating this cycle of denial of male victimization needs to be interrupted; donor education, political perspectives, power differentials, and organizational attitudes need to be addressed simultaneously (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 163). Developing efficient and pragmatic approaches can have profound implications on resource distributions that simultaneously cause a substantial shift in organizational and SGBV settings (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 168). Such approaches can result in a tangible transition towards much-needed attention and research geared towards UASB in vulnerable settings.

Although male and female-centered SGBV and health services must be delivered, organizations and providers must caution to avoid competition between genders for services and funds or comparativeness of disparities amongst vulnerable groups. For male victims, contemporary approaches need to be conceptualized to tackle foundational

inadequacies that plague mindsets and approaches. Although the 3-C approach can help overcome the vast ignorance and disregard accumulated over the years regarding male victims of SGBV, no number of policies or programs can protect UASB inside camp settings if actors are unwilling to implement integral components for a broader resolve whole-heartedly. All actors must contribute sincere efforts to bring urgently needed attention and applicable change to the field. Collaboration between actors can help mitigate the perpetual cycle of sexual exploitation in many refugee camps, which will undoubtedly help all vulnerable populations regardless of age or gender. Impactful change is inevitable with unified approaches.

Nevertheless, a small but rapidly growing voice within the SGBV community is speaking out on behalf of UASB, who desperately need research, programs, and policies that are uniquely specific to their needs while at the same time providing them a platform to be heard. What is promising are the growing commitments, creativity, and visionary attitudes (HAGAR & World Vision, p. 157) regarding males and SGBV that are beginning to flow through conversations — ones that can lead to profound real-world impacts for UASB, and ultimately male victims in general. Still, many providers and organizations hesitate to call specific attention to male victims of sexual exploitation, including their direct reference in SGBV conversations. On the contrary, creating services for both males and females can help foster mutual support and respect to help break down restrictive gender stereotypes, ultimately aiding in the fight against sexual exploitation of all vulnerable populations. Piloting various services, including community-based programs, that target UASB can occur without comprising support, services, and funding for women and girls (WRC, 2018, p. 13).

Legitimate actions initiated immediately can help conclude an enduring cycle of misinformation that include misaligned concerns that have resulted in substantial delays in urgently needed research and resources for male victims. Concerted efforts to develop genuine discussions on proper qualitative and quantitative research methods that acknowledge male victims while at the same time not diminishing the victimhood of females are indeed plausible. Actors at the forefront, such as globally recognized organizations, need to forge the way ahead in the humanitarian field to acknowledge the unique circumstances of UASB living in camp settings. This acknowledgment comes in inclusivity in SGBV conversations and special considerations in protocols and policies by exclusively mentioning words such as “boys” when discussing vulnerable populations.

It is imperative to remember the significant lack of appropriate services and funding for all SGBV victims, regardless of age and gender. Much work is still needed to implement properly placed mechanisms to stifle exploitation and provide dependable post-care services. Although the road to representation is currently an uphill battle for UASB, who are trapped in harmful gender rhetoric, there seems to be a silver lining on the horizon. Research has shown that boys who received support “demonstrated remarkable resilience and had forward-looking attitudes” (WRC, 2019, p. 46), even after traumatic experiences such as sexual exploitation. Although such experiences can leave numerous traumatic scars on victims, UASB can regain a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives (WRC, 2019, March, p. 46). Conversations and approaches will continue to develop with dedication and practicality, creating genuinely inclusive environments.

Still, there is no time like the present to start making progress.

## Appendix A: Definitions

Child: According to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every person below the age of 18 years is considered a “child” (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990, Part I., Article I). Although the legal age of what constitutes a child can differ by country, this paper will use the definitional age provided by the UN. What is worth noting is that the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC) does not subscribe to the term “minor” and instead recommends that the term “child” be referenced to establish the use of the definition of “child,” as set out in the Convention (IAWG-UASC, 2016, p. 15).

Exploitation: Commonly referred to definitions of “exploitation” designate two alternate meanings, both of which apply to the topic of this research paper: The first reference is regarding the use of or acquiring benefit from a thing or situation. The second reference is regarding relationships between people, especially those that take advantage of a person for one’s benefit (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p. 21).

Exploiter: A person who uses another person or thing for his/her own benefit or gain, including financial profit. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): An umbrella term referring to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender (UNHCR, GBV, n.d.) and is used to distinguish such acts from other common forms of violence (UNHCR 2003, p. 10). When specifically referencing sexual gender-based violence, the acronym “SGBV” is used.

GBV includes physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, as well as the threat of such acts, coercion, and other denials of liberty (UNHCR 2003, p. 10).

Prostitution: The terms “prostitution” and “sex work” are often used interchangeably, thus confusing the legality of a person selling a sexual act. Although what exactly defines “prostitution” can vary from region to region, this paper will refer to a generalized understanding of the term as the direct exchange of sexual services for money or other utilities (Danna, 2015, p. 5). For this paper, any form of prostitution of a UASC will be considered a form of sexual exploitation.

Refugee: According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a “refugee” is a person "who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin" due to the fear of persecution based on "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, Refugee, n.d.). It is important to note here that “mixed flows” during complex emergencies is an umbrella term that includes refugees, asylum seekers and variations of migrant groups (Mullally & Raissian, 2019, p. 27). For this paper, the term “refugee” will be used to identify this generalized mixed flow of individuals, including migrants, UASC and UASB.

Refugee camp: Temporary arrangements constructed to provide immediate protection and assistance to people who have been forced to leave their homes due to war, persecution, or violence (UNHCR, Refugee, n.d.). In this research paper, “refugee camp” refers to permanent or temporary sites, illegal or illegal, and official or unofficial. Therefore, a less restrictive umbrella term - “refugee camp setting/s” - will be used throughout this paper to encompass various levels of refugee camp configurations, including squat locations.



Sexual abuse: Although sexual abuse can take place at any age and against any gender, Save the Children (2007) defines it as an intentional act of “ill treatment that can harm or is likely to cause harm to a child's safety, well-being, dignity and development.” Such abuse “includes all forms of physical, sexual, psychological or emotional ill treatment” and includes various forms of sexual violence (incest, forced marriage, rape). Sexual abuse towards a child may also include “indecent touching or exposure, using sexually explicit language towards a child and showing children pornographic material or sexual abuse on the internet” (p. 3). Not all forms of sexual abuse are sexually exploitative, as they may not be executed for gain (other than personal gratification), but sexual exploitation does contain elements of sexual abuse. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge both terms.

Sexual exploitation: When a person is forced to perform non-consensual commercial sex acts (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018), including “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust” that results in monetary profits or social or political gains (WRC, 2019, March, p. 39).

Sexual Violence: According to HRW, although rape is the most referenced form of sexual violence, many other acts fall under this term, including the “insertion of objects into genital openings, oral and anal coitus, attempted rape and the infliction of other sexually abusive acts.” The direct use or threat of intimidation or force in “order to have sexual acts performed by third persons” may also be involved in sexual violence. What is important to note is that HRW uses the term “sexual violence” as a blanket term to cover a wide variety of acts, such as “sexual threat, assault, interference and exploitation, including ‘statutory rape’ and molestation without physical harm or

penetration.” Throughout this paper, the term “sexual exploitation” will also include acts of sexual violence.

Trafficking: The UNODC (2004) defines “trafficking” as:

...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation... (Article 3(a.), p. 42).

For this study, sexual exploitation will be used as an umbrella term that also includes sex trafficking.

UASB: For this paper, the term “unaccompanied and separated boy(s)” will be used when referencing male children who fit the below description of “UASC.”

UASC: This term should be broken down into two distinct phrases to identify the distinction: Unaccompanied children (also referred to as “unaccompanied minors”) are children who have been completely separated from any family members and are not being cared for by an adult who would be considered a (legal) guardian. Separated children are separated from both parents or caregivers, but not necessarily from other relatives (and are accompanied by adult family members) (IAWG-UASC, 2016, p. 15).

Victim: According to the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, a “victim” means a person who:

“...individually or collectively, has suffered harm in the form of physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws operative within Member States, including those laws proscribing criminal abuse of power” (UNHCR, A.,1.)

Although some studies utilize the word “survivor” rather than “victim,” for the purpose of this research, the term “victim” will be used when referencing those who have experienced any form of sexual exploitation.

## Appendix B: Sample Questionnaire

Q1. Name (Please leave blank if you wish to stay anonymous for the entire questionnaire)

Q2. Organization and Official Title: (Please leave one or both responses blank if you wish to stay anonymous for this question)

Q3. What is your professional field of work? (Please check all that apply):  
Humanitarian/Aid worker; Volunteer NGO Worker/Volunteer; United Nations  
Employee/Volunteer Government Official; Military/Police Official  
Researcher/Writer/Journalist Professor; Other: (Please explain)

Q4. How long have you been working in your current field? (0-4 years 5-9 years 10-14 years 15-19 years 20+ years)

Q5. Where is your current location?

Q6. Have you directly spent any time in or supported work being done in refugee camp settings? If so, please state where, when, and why you were there

Q7. Have you (either currently or in the past) worked directly with child victims (under the age of 18 years) of sexual exploitation? Sexual exploitation includes any forms of sexual abuse, including sex trafficking, regardless if a gain or profit was made from the exploitation.

Q8. If you answered "Yes" to the above question: a) Were the victims primarily boys or girls?; b) About how old was the child/children? If you do not remember or want to give specifics, please generalize:

Q9. Have you or your organization worked with sexually exploited unaccompanied refugee children? If so, were the victims worked with primarily male or female?

Q10. Are you or your organization aware of the issue of the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied boys in refugee camp settings?

Q11. Have you ever encountered a sexual exploiter and/or trafficker in or around a refugee camp setting? If so, where was this located and who were being exploited (men, women, or children- boys, girls)?

Q12. Are you aware of the risks unaccompanied boys in refugee camp settings face in regard to being sexually exploited? Please elaborate:

*Q13.* From your understanding or experience(s), what methods do exploiters use to recruit or lure in unaccompanied children for the purpose of sexual exploitation?

*Q14.* In your professional or personal opinion, do you think sexual abusers in refugee settings concentrate on a particular gender and/or age group to exploit? Please elaborate

*Q15.* In your professional or personal opinion, why don't refugee boys who are currently being or have been sexually exploited seek help regarding their abuse, either from authorities or humanitarian organizations in the field?

*Q16.* In your professional or personal opinion, do you believe that enough is being done to protect unaccompanied boys in refugee camp settings from being sexually exploited? Please elaborate:

*Q17.* If you do not believe that enough is being done to protect unaccompanied refugee boys, please elaborate on how the overall situation can be bettered (this can include camp security, protective services, collaborative efforts, funding, etc.):

*Q18.* In your professional or personal opinion, how mis/under-represented do you believe the issue of the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied boys in refugee camp settings is? Please elaborate:

*Q19.* In your professional or personal opinion, is the subject of the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied refugee boys treated as urgently as the sexual exploitation of refugee females (women/girls)? Please elaborate:

*Q20.* In your professional or personal opinion, do you think general attention on S/GBV predominantly concentrates on females (women and girls)? Please elaborate:

*Q21.* If you answered "Yes" to the above, do you think this causes oversight on the issue of unaccompanied boys being sexually exploited in refugee camp settings (or in general)? Please elaborate:

*Q22.* In your professional or personal opinion, do you believe that the gender-neutral language used in policies, protocols and research translates into real-world application? For example, would a gender-neutral policy be applied as gender-neutral in field practice, or is there still a tendency for programs to heavily concentrate on female oriented S/GBV projects/programs? Please elaborate:

*Q23.* In your professional or personal opinion, do you think the issue of the sexual exploitation of boys in refugee camp settings is statistically under-represented? Please elaborate:

*Q24.* If you answered "Yes" to the above question, in your professional or personal opinion, what reason(s) contribute to the lack of accurate statistics? This might include, but not be limited to, less attention from government/law enforcement agencies or

humanitarian organizations; less funding for exploited refugee boys than refugee girls; less media attention; intentional manipulation of existing data or in-field experiences, etc.:

*Q25.* In your professional or personal opinion, is the issue of the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied boys in refugee camp settings discussed enough either in research or in organizational settings? Please elaborate:

*Q26.* In your professional or personal opinion, are organizations more willing and/or comfortable discussing S/GBV directed towards females (women/girls) than against males (men/boys)? Please elaborate:

*Q27.* In what ways do you or your organization identify signs of child sexual exploitation in refugee camp settings? This can apply to either systems to directly identify abuse or for reporting said abuse. (Please indicate if there are signs that identify a trafficker/exploiter, a victim, etc.):

*Q28.* Does your organization place heavy emphasis on female oriented causes, research, policies, initiatives and/or programs? Please elaborate:

*Q29.* In your professional or personal opinion, do you believe that there are more organizations, programs and/or research that emphasizes the risks of S/GBV towards females (women/girls) compared to the risks males (men/boys) face? Please elaborate:

*Q30.* In your professional or personal opinion, do you believe that funding (public or private) is disproportionately allocated towards female-oriented S/GBV programs and/or research? Please elaborate:

*Q31.* In your professional or personal opinion, is your organization (or other organizations in general) unable or unwilling to confront the issue of the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied boys in refugee camp settings? Please elaborate:

*Q32.* In your professional or personal opinion, do organizational reports provide an accurate picture of the sexual exploitation of refugee boys (in general)? Please elaborate:

*Q33.* In your professional or personal opinion, is there a disparity in organizational reports on the sexual exploitation of refugees that predominantly focuses on females? Please elaborate:

*Q34.* If you are comfortable doing so, would you like to share any relevant information, knowledge or accounts that pertain to the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied refugee boys in general or in camp settings? For example, you can share examples of cases of unaccompanied boys being sexually exploited in refugee camps, the challenges field workers face in identifying such victims, a possible lack of interest in providing male-oriented programs, etc.. If you are willing to share, please do not include any personal identifiable information, such as names of victims or perpetrators. Please do feel free to

include age(s) of the boy(s), name and/or location of the refugee camp or other details you feel comfortable sharing.

*Q35.* If you are comfortable doing so, please share additional personal or professional comments/opinions regarding the general topic of the sexual exploitation of unaccompanied refugee boys and/or about the general S/GBV conversations, including any critiques, criticisms, recommendations, etc.:

*Q36.* Please feel free to include any additional comments or suggestions.

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